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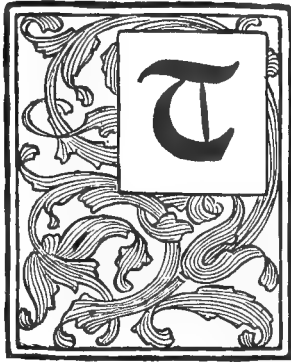
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THE SONGS OF BILITIS



PIERRE LOUÿS



he Songs of Bilitis

Translated from the Greek
Put into English from the
French of

PIERRE LOUÿS

By HORACE MANCHESTER BROWN



PRIVATELY PRINTED FOR MEMBERS OF
THE ALDUS SOCIETY
LONDON AND NEW YORK, 1904

Edition de Grand Luxe



F this book there have been printed nine hundred and seventy-one copies on a special paper, with the watermark of the Society, and twenty-six signed and lettered copies, and three author's copies on Imperial Japanese vellum with the initials hand-illuminated, of which this is

Number 835

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By H. M. BROWN

KS

THE SONGS OF BILITIS

THIS LITTLE BOOK OF ANTIQUE LOVE

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

TO THE YOUNG LADIES OF THE SOCIETY OF THE FUTURE



TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE



THE reader of Plato, whether he be a student, or a mere amateur of the classics, has indeed read to but little advantage, if he has failed to derive from the clear logical argument and concise description of the old philosopher, a thorough perception of that feeling of admiration of the beauty of the human form, and the admirableness of physical perfection, which, among the ancients, whether Persian, Egyptian, or Greek, amounted almost to worship.

The translator of the "Songs of Bilitis" was led to undertake the work as a matter of personal amusement, and his appreciation of the success attained by Pierre Louÿs in giving expression in modern French to that same feeling of admiration for the beauty of

the human form, which, it, would almost seem in the case of the gifted French poet, must be a species of obsession.

Notwithstanding the weighty argument and the learned polemics of the distinguished professor in Gottingen, who in 1896 took up arms in learned protest against this collection of pictures of ancient Greek life, told in exquisitely beautiful modern French, and who sought, with it as a text, to bring forward an unnecessary defence of the character of that wonderful priestess and inspiratrice, Sappho, the translator has felt that such a protest and such a defence were unnecessary, and has believed that the beauty of the pictures presented by many of the songs is sufficient excuse for their existence, in spite of the marked flavor of sexualism that detracts from, while it does not embellish, the idea sought to be presented.

The most enthusiastic defender of the ancients is bound to admit that the pure sexualism and the various forms of sexual degeneracy described in these poems do not furnish an overdrawn picture of the social conditions among the Greeks at the period described; and while there is always a grave question

for moralists and regulators of social ethics, concerning the advisability of informing the public as to the facts in this respect, the translator believes that public education has so tempered the minds of the majority of the people of this country, that a book of this character can safely be placed in their hands without harm to individuals and without producing any general perversion of public morals or of public conduct.

There is no doubt that for many the book was a mystification, upon its first appearance in 1894; that its pretence of being a collection of songs "translated from the Greek for the first time" was believed by many, who should have known better, to be a truthful assertion.

It would even seem, from the character of the criticisms which its appearance called forth in Europe, that many of the "dry as dust" professors of antiquities in the European universities were deceived. It needs, however, but a superficial knowledge of Greek and Greek literature to enable one to discover the many anachronisms that prove it to be a modern production. However this may be, no one will deny that the young poet, Pierre Louÿs, has succeeded in placing before his readers a collection of poems in

prose which for delicacy of touch, and beauty of language, has seldom been equalled.

This translation, as I have previously stated, was originally made for the translator's personal amusement, and it has only been after the insistence of people of taste and refinement that he has seen fit to offer it to the public. To people of education and correct taste it will appeal as it should. To those who have neither of these, and who, through natural inheritance or acquired degeneracy, are unable to accept it as the collection of true poems that it is, the translator can only say "*Puris omnia pura.*"

In the effort to convey to the reader, as far as the English language is capable of conveying, the subtlety of the French phrasing, the translator has sought to avoid all forms of circumlocution, and, wherever possible, to employ the simplest English words and forms, believing that in a work of this character, strength lies largely in simplicity. The capacity of the French language for expressing in a soft and inoffensive manner many things which cannot be made clear in English without a shock to the sensibilities, has been met, as far as possible, by literal translation, and as this book has not been made for

the satisfaction of the taste of the uneducated, it is believed its readers will find no difficulty in understanding to the fullest extent the ideas of the poet author.

HORACE MANCHESTER BROWN.

Milwaukee, U. S. A., September, 1903.





LIFE OF BILITIS



BILITIS was born at the commencement of the sixth century before our era, in a mountain village situated upon the banks of the Melas in the eastern part of Pamphylia. The country is rough and forbidding, shadowed by huge forests and dominated by the enormous mass of Mt. Taurus. Springs, heavily charged with lime, flow from its rocks, huge salt lakes slumber among its heights, and its valleys are dark and silent.

She was the daughter of a Greek and of a Phœnician woman. She seems never to have known her Greek father, for his name appears in no part of her souvenirs of her infancy. It is even possible that he died before she came into the world, otherwise it would be difficult to explain how it happened that

she bore a Phœnician name, such as alone her mother could have given her.

In this almost deserted land, she lived a life of tranquillity with her mother and sisters. Other young girls who were her friends lived not distant from her. Upon the wooded plateaus of Taurus, shepherds watched and tended their flocks.

In the morning, with the crowing of the cocks, she rose, went to the stable, led out the animals to drink, and busied herself with their milking. During the day, if it rained, she remained in the gynæceum, and worked with her distaff. On the days that were fine she ran about the fields, and played a thousand games with her companions, of which she tells us.

It is evident that for the nymphs Bilitis had a most tender regard, and worshipped them with a most ardent piety. The sacrifices that she offered were nearly always at their fountain. Often even, she speaks of them, but it seems she never had seen them, so much does she hold in veneration the souvenirs of a blind old man, who was said once to have surprised them while bathing.

The end of her pastoral existence was saddened by an amour, concerning which we know but little, al-

though in her songs she speaks of it at length. She ceased to sing of it as soon as it became a saddened memory. Become the mother of a child which she abandoned, Bilitis quitted Pamphylia for unknown reasons, and never again saw the place of her birth. We find her later at Mytilène, whither she went by sea, coasting along the beautiful shores of Asia.

At this time she was scarcely sixteen years old, according to the conjecture of Heim, who established with some show of probability certain dates in the life of Bilitis, from a verse which makes allusion to the death of Pittakos.

Lesbos was then the centre of the world. On the main road between beautiful Attica and luxurious Lydia, it had for its capital a more sumptuous city than Athens and one more corrupt than Sardes: Mytilène, builded upon a peninsula which looked out upon the shores of Asia. The blue sea almost entirely surrounded the city. From the towers of the temples one could see on the horizon the white line of Atarnée, which was the port of Pergamos.

Its narrow streets were always crowded by a throng, brilliant in many-colored dresses, tunics of purple and of hyacinth, cycladés of transparent silks, mantles

dragging in the dust made by the yellow shoes. The women wore huge rings of gold set with native pearls, in their ears, and upon their arms masses of bracelets of silver, roughly chiselled in relief. The men themselves wore their hair in curls perfumed with rare oils. The Greeks were distinguished by their sandals fastened to their heels with latchets ornamented with serpents' heads of bright metal, while the Asiatics dressed their feet in short boots of soft tinted leather. A gossiping and merry people gathered before the façades of the stores, discussing the goods, the rugs of dark color, the cloths woven with threads of gold, the jewels of amber and ivory, according to the particular quarter occupied by the merchants. The life and animation of Mytilène were not ended with the day: there was no hour so late that one could not hear, from open doors, the joyous sound of musical instruments, the laughter and cries of women, and the noise of dances. Pittakos himself, who desired to bring order into this chaos of perpetual debauch, made a law which forbade the merry players of flutes, when under a certain age, to serve at the nocturnal festivals; but this law, like all laws which pretend to change the course of natural morals, only served to

stimulate its own infraction, and not to encourage its observance.

In a society where the husbands were occupied in the night with wine and dancing women, the wives could not fail to seek some solace for their solitude, and to find consolation for their ennui. From this it came about that they were led to give themselves to those delicate amours, to which antiquity itself gave their name, and which possess, whatever men may think, more of true passion than of peculiar vice.

At this time Sappho was still beautiful. Bilitis knew her, and speaks of her under the name of Psappha, the name under which she passed in Lesbos. It was that admirable woman who taught the little Pamphylienne the art of singing in rhythmic phrases, and to preserve for posterity the names and lives of her dear friends.

Unfortunately Bilitis gives but few details concerning this remarkable woman, to-day so little known, and there is great reason to regret that this is the case, since the least word touching this grand inspiratrice would have been of the greatest value. In revenge she has left us thirty elegiac songs, the history of her friendship with a young girl of her own age, who was

called Mnasidika, and who lived with her. We were already familiar with this beautiful girl through a verse of Sappho, in which her beauty is praised, but her name even is doubtful, and Bergk seems to believe that she was simply called Mnais. The songs that we shall read later on prove that this hypothesis may be abandoned. Mnasidika seems to have been a very sweet and innocent little girl, one of those charming creatures who have for a mission in life only to allow themselves to be loved; one of those women for whom there is absolutely no need of effort on their part, to secure the love that is always ready to be given them.

Intrigues without motives last the longest: this love of Bilitis for Mnasidika lasted ten years. It was ended through the fault of Bilitis, whose excessive jealousy permitted of no eclecticism of affection.

When she felt that nothing longer bound her to Mytilène, except her unhappy memories, Bilitis made a second journey: she went to Cyprus, an island, part Greek, and part Phœnician, like Pamphylia itself; and which must have recalled to her many times the aspect and the memory of her native land.

It was there that Bilitis commenced a third period

of her life, and that in a manner it will be difficult for my readers to understand, unless they recall and recognize to what high degree love was a holy thing among the ancient peoples.

The courtesans of Amathonte were not like ours, creatures of misfortune, exiled from all decent society : they were daughters of the best and most notable families of the city. Aphrodite had given them beauty, and they returned thanks to the goddess in consecrating to the service of her worship the beauty they had received. Every city that possessed, like those of Cyprus, a temple rich in courtesans, held these women in the same respected position.

The incomparable history of Phrynæ, as it has been handed down to us by Athena, will give some idea what was the nature of that veneration. It is not true that Hyperides stripped her stark naked in order to influence the Aréopagus. Her crime was a great one. She had committed murder. The orator in sustaining his eloquent appeal simply tore off the upper part of her tunic, and exposed only her bosom to the eyes of the judges, and appealed to them not to put to death the beautiful priestess and the woman inspired by Aphrodite.

In distinction from her were many courtesans who went about dressed in transparent flowing robes, through which appeared all the details of their bodies, while Phrynæ was in the habit of concealing her charms and her hair in one of those full plaited vestments, of which the figurines of Tanagra have preserved to us the beauty and the grace. No one, unless it were her lovers, had ever seen her arms or her shoulders, and she never appeared in the pool of the public baths. But upon one occasion a most extraordinary event occurred. It was the day of the fête of Eleusis; twenty thousand people came from all parts of Greece, and were assembled upon the shore, when Phrynæ stepped forward out of the throng, and stood at the margin of the waves. She let fall her mantle, untied her cincture, and even dropped her tunic; she let down all of her beautiful hair, and, naked, entered the water. In this crowd stood Praxiteles, who, after this living goddess, designed the Aphrodite of Cnidos: and Apelles, who from her modelled the figure of his Anadyomène. An admirable people that, to whom beauty naked might show itself without exciting laughter or false shame.

I would that this history were that of Bilitis, for, in translating her songs, I myself have learned to love the friend of Mnasidika. Without doubt her life was admirable also. I regret that she has not been mentioned in history more often, and that the ancient authors, at least those whose works have come down to us, have given us so little knowledge concerning her personality. Philodémes, who at least twice deceived her, does not even mention her name. Failing in knowledge of her from other sources, we must be willing to be content with the details that she herself has given us concerning her life as a courtesan.

She was a courtesan, that is not to be denied; even her last songs prove that if she had the virtues of her vocation, she had also its faults. But I wish only to place her before the reader in the light shed upon her by her merits. She was pious, and a practiser of her religion. She remained faithful to the temple so long as Aphrodite consented to prolong the youth of her most pure adorer. She has said "When she ceased to love, she ceased to write." Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that the songs of Pamphylia could have been written at the epoch in her life during

which the incidents described were actual occurrences. How should a little shepherdess of the mountains learn to scan the difficult rhythms of the Æolean verse? It is more reasonable to believe that, become old, Bilitis found pleasure in singing for herself the memories of her distant childhood. We know nothing concerning this last period of her life. We do not even know at what age she died.

Her tomb was discovered by M. G. Heim at Palæo-Limisso, by the side of an ancient roadway not far from the lines of Amathonte. These ruins have nearly disappeared during the past thirty years, and the stones of the house, in which perhaps Bilitis lived, are used to-day to pave the quays of Port Said. But the tomb was subterranean, according to the Phœnician custom, and it had escaped even the thieves hunting for treasure. Heim entered into the tomb by the way of a ditch once filled with earth, at the end of which he encountered a huge doorway, which it was necessary to demolish. The broad, low tomb, paved with slabs of limestone, had four walls covered with plaques of amphibolite, upon which were engraved, in primitive capitals, all the songs which we are about to read, with the exception of three epitaphs,

which decorated the outside of the sarcophagus. It was there that reposed the remains of the friend of Mnasidika, in a large coffin of terra-cotta, under a cover modelled by some able statuary, who had figured in the clay the visage of the dead. The hair was painted black, the eyes half closed and prolonged outwardly with a touch of crayon, as if she had been alive, and the cheek as shown was made tender by a slight smile that softened the lines of the mouth. Nothing can ever tell us what were those lips, at the same time fine and full, soft and cleanly cut, united the one to the other, and yet slightly separated, as if exhausted with the intoxication of their own contact.

When the tomb was opened, she appeared in the state in which a pious hand had placed her, twenty-four centuries before. Vials of perfume hung to the pegs of clay, and one of them, even after all these years, was still odorous.

The mirror of polished silver, in which Bilitis had so often seen her face, the stylet that had drawn the blue pigment about her eyelashes, were found in their place. A little statue of Astarte naked, relic forever precious, watched always over the skeleton ornamented

with all its jewels of gold, and white as the branch of a tree covered with snow, and so soft and fragile that, at the moment when it was breathed upon, it crumbled away into dust.

PIERRE LOUÏS.

Constantinople, August, 1894.



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I

BUCOLICS IN PAMPHYLIA

Sweet still to me the melodies, and the singing reeds,
The prattling pan-pipes, and the harmonious flutes.

— THEOCRITUS.

I
THE TREE

.



TRIPPED of my clothes, naked, I climbed into a tree. My bare thighs in a close embrace pressed the smooth damp bark. My sandals trod upon the branches.

Almost at the top, but still under the leaves in the shadow from the heat, I put myself astride of a projecting branch, my legs dangling in the air.

The rain came, and cool drops fell upon me and ran over my skin. My hands were soiled with moss, and my toes were red with the juice of crushed flowers.

I felt the life of the beautiful tree when the wind blew through its branches. Then I pressed my thighs together in an ecstasy, and laid my open lips against the hairy nape of a limb.

II
SONG OF THE FIELDS

[30]



LET us sing a song of the fields. Let us call upon Pan, god of the winds of Summer. Selenis and I together watch our flocks from the round shadow of the trembling leaves of an olive-tree.

Selenis lies prone upon the meadow. She springs to her feet, and runs, or chases the locusts; gathers the flowers and grasses, or washes her face in the fresh, cold water of the brook.

And I, I drowsily draw the long wool from the white fleece of my sheep to garnish my distaff while I spin. The hours glide softly by. An eagle soars through the blue heavens.

The shadow turns. Let us move the basket of flowers and the jar of milk. Let us sing a song of the fields. Let us call upon Pan, god of the winds of Summer.

III

MATERNAL ADVICE

[32]



Y mother bathes me in the darkness.
She dresses me in the full brightness
of the sun, and braids my hair in the
light, but if I walk out by the light of
the moon, she draws my girdle, and
makes in it a double knot.

She says to me, "Thou shalt play alone with
virgins, and dance with little children ; look not out
of the window, flee from the soft words of men, and
beware the counsel of widows."

Some evening some one, e'en as is the fate of all,
will come to lead thee across the threshold into the
midst of a great company, amid the music of sonorous
drums, and amorous flutes.

That evening when thou shalt go away, Bilito,
thou shalt leave to me three gourds of gall ; one for
the morning, one for the noon, and the third, the
most bitter of all, the third for the days of fête.

IV
THE NAKED FEET



MY blue black hair in wavy folds hangs down my back, and on my head I wear a little cap. My vest is made of snow-white wool. My legs grow hard and brown with the scorching heat of the sun.

If I lived in a city I would have jewels of gold, and vestments embroidered in gold, and slippers of silver. I look upon my naked feet in their slippers of dust.

Psophis : come to me, poor little one, lead me to the springs, wash my feet with thy little hands, and press upon them olives and violets to perfume them, even as the flowers.

To-day thou shalt be my slave, thou shalt follow me and serve me, and at the end of the day I will give thee, for thy mother, round lentils from my garden.

V

THE OLD MAN AND THE NYMPHS

[36]



BLIND old man lives upon the mountain. Because he has seen the nymphs, his eyes are dead since many years, and now for that he is blind, his happiness is in the memory of the long past.

“Yes, I have seen them,” he said to me, “Helo-psychria, Limnanthi; they stood together near the bank in the green pond of Physos. The water sparkled higher than their knees.

“Their necks bent forward under their heavy, long hair. Their nails were thin and sparkled as the wings of locusts. Their nipples were hollow like the cup of the hyacinth.

“They moved their fingers upon the water, and drew up as from an invisible vase, water-lilies with long stems. About their wide-spread thighs soft ripples circled.”

VI
SONG

[38]



TORTI-TORTUE, what doest thou
here among us ?

— I wind off the wool and thread of
Milet.

Helas ! Helas ! why do you not come
and dance ?

— I am too full of sorrow. I am too full of sorrow.

Torti-tortue, what doest thou here among us ?

— I cut a reed for the funeral flute.

Helas ! Helas ! What has happened him ?

— I will not tell you. I will not tell you.

Torti-tortue, what doest thou here among us ?

— I press the olives for the oil for the stelè (gravestone).

Helas ! Helas ! And who, then, is dead ?

— How can you ask ? How can you ask ?

Torti-tortue, what doest thou here among us ?

— He has fallen in the sea.

Helas ! Helas ! Oh, tell us how ?

— From the back of white horses. From the back of
white horses.

VII
THE PASSER - BY



S I was seated at dusk before the door of the house, a young man passed me. He looked toward me, and I turned away my head. He spoke to me, but I did not reply.

He wished to approach me. I snatched a sickle from the wall, and would have slashed his cheek, had he advanced a step.

Then drawing back a little, he commenced to smile, and blew in his hand toward me, saying, "Receive my kiss." I cried out, and wept in such distress that my mother hastened to me.

Annoyed, believing that I had been stung as by a scorpion, I wept and cried, "He has embraced me!" But my mother kissed and embraced me also, and led me away in her arms.

VIII
THE AWAKENING



LONG since, the sun has risen, and I should also rise. But the sleep of the morning is sweet, and the softness and warmth of my bed hold me as in a caress.

In a short while I will go to the stable. I will give to the goats their grass and flowers, and the flask of fresh water drawn from the well, where I will drink at the same time with them.

Then I will fasten them to the post and draw milk from their warm, soft udders, and if the kids are not jealous of me, I will suck with them from the softened teats.

Amalthèia, has she not nursed Dzeus? I will go then. But not yet. The sun has risen too soon, and my mother is not yet awake.

IX
THE RAIN



THE fine rain has poured forth sadly, softly, and in silence. And still it rains, a little. I will go out and walk in the streets. My feet shall be naked, that I may not soil my shoes.

The rain of spring-time is delicious. The branches of the trees, loaded with moist flowers, give forth a perfume which intoxicates me. One sees the smooth and delicate bark of the branches glisten in the sun.

Helas ! How many flowers upon the ground ! Have pity upon the fallen flowers. Do not sweep them together, and mix them in the mud, but save them for the bees.

The beetles and the snails crawl slowly in the road between the pools of water ; I would not tread upon them, nor harm that gilded lizard, which runs away snapping his eyelids.

X
THE FLOWERS



YMPHS of the woods and fountains,
sweetest of friends, behold me. Hide
not your faces from me, but come to
my aid, for I am burdened with many
plucked flowers.

Help me to choose from the whole forest some
poor hamadryad with lifted arms, and in her hair,
color of the leaves, I will place my heaviest rose.

Look! I have brought so many of them from the
fields, that I cannot bear them back, if you do not
help me to make them into a garland. If you refuse
me: Beware.

She among you with the orange hair, I saw her
yesterday in the embrace of the satyr Lamphrosathes,
after the manner of the beasts, and I will denounce
the shameless one.

XI
IMPATIENCE

[48]

*“Nymphs of the woods and fountains,
sweetest of friends, behold me.”*

— THE FLOWERS.

Original Etching by James Fagan.





THREW myself weeping into her arms, and long she felt my hot tears pour upon her shoulders, before my sorrow let me speak.

“Alas! I am only a little child. The young men never look toward me. When shall I, like thee, have the breasts of a young woman, that shall fill out my tunic, and be temptation for kisses?

“No one has curious eyes if my tunic falls. No one picks up for me a flower that drops from my hair. No one tells me that he will kill me if I give my lips to another.”

And she replied to me tenderly. “Bilitis, little girl, thou criest like a cat at the moon, and makest thyself sad without reason. They that are most impatient, are not those that are soonest chosen.”

XII
COMPARISON

[50]



BERGERONETTE,¹ bird of Venus, sing of our first desires ! The bodies of young girls bloom with beauty, as does the earth with flowers. The night of all our dreams approaches, and we will talk about it among ourselves.

We will compare together our beauties, so different, our hair so long and beautiful, our young breasts, still so small, our puberties round as shells, and hidden under the young down.

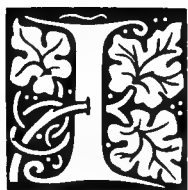
Yesterday I competed with Melantho, my older sister. She was proud of her pretty breasts that had grown in a month, and pointing to my straight tunic, she called me " Little Child."

No man could see us ; we placed ourselves before the girls, all naked, and, if in one point she vanquished me, I excelled her far in others. Come ! Bergeronette, bird of Venus, sing with us our first desires !

¹ Water-wagtail, a bird sacred to Venus.

XIII
THE RIVER IN THE FOREST

[52]



BATHED in the river of the forest,
alone. Alas! the Naiads were afraid
of me, for I but faintly saw them as
from afar under the dark water.

I called upon them. That I might resemble
them, I bound upon my nuke lilies, black as my
hair; with the berries of yellow wallflowers.

Of a long floating plant I made me a green belt,
and that I might see it, I pressed up my breasts as I
leaned forward.

And I called "Naiads! Naiads! Come play
with me! Be kind!" But the Naiads are trans-
parent, and perhaps without knowing, I have caressed
their graceful arms.

XIV
COME, MELISSA



HEN the heat of the sun is softened,
we will go and play upon the banks
of the river, we will wrestle for a frail
crocus, or for a dewy hyacinth.

We will make them into round collars, and into
garlands, prizes for our running. We will take each
other by the hand, and by the border of our tunics.

Come, sweet one! Give us honey. Come,
Naiads! We would bathe with you; come, sweet
ones! throw a shade over our sweating bodies.

And we will make offerings to you, not shameful
wine, but honey and milk, and young kids with
curved horns.

XV
THE SYMBOLIC RING

[56]



THE women of Lydia, so say the travellers who return from Sardis, bedeck themselves from the top of their hair to the tips of their tinted toes, with collars and precious stones.

The women of my land have neither bracelets nor diadems, but their fingers wear a ring of silver, and upon the bezel is engraved the triangle of the goddess.

When they turn the point without, they mean to say, "Psyche is to be had." When the point is turned within, they mean, "Psyche is taken."

The men believe this, the women do not. As for me I never regard to which side the point is turned, for Psyche gives herself freely. Psyche is always to be had.

XVI
DANCES BY MOONLIGHT

[58]



PON the soft grass, in the night, the young girls with hair of violets have all danced together, one of each pair playing the part of lover.

The virgins said : “ We are not for you.” And as if they were ashamed, they hid their virginity. A satyr played upon the flute under the trees.

The others said : “ We have come to seek you.” They arranged their tunics about them like the dress of men ; and they struggled in ecstasy while entwining their dancing legs.

Then each one feeling herself vanquished, took her lover by the ears even as one takes a beaker by the two handles, and, the head bent forward, drank a kiss.

XVII
THE LITTLE CHILDREN

[60]



HE river is almost dry ; the faded jonquils are dying in the marsh ; the air burns, and far within the hollow banks a clear stream flows upon the gravel.

It is there that from morning to evening the little naked children come to play. They wade in the stream, not deeper than up to their calves, so low is the river.

But they walk in the current, and sometimes slip upon the rocks, and the boys throw water at the little girls, who run and laugh.

And when a troop of passing merchants lead their huge white oxen to the stream to drink, they cross their hands behind them and look in astonishment at the great beasts.

XVIII
THE STORIES

[62]



AM loved by little children; when they see me they run to me, and hide themselves in my tunic, and throw their little arms around my legs.

If they have gathered flowers, they give them all to me, if they have caught a beetle, they put it in my hand, if they have nothing, they kiss me and make me sit down among them.

Then they kiss me upon my cheek. They lay their little heads upon my breast, and implore me with their eyes. Well I know what it is they wish to say.

They would say, "Dearest Bilitis, tell us again, for we are good, the story of the hero Perseus, or the death of little Helle."

XIX
THE MARRIED FRIEND

[64]



OUR mothers were pregnant at the same time, and to-night she will be married, Melissa, my dearest friend. The roses still lie upon the road; the torches still burn.

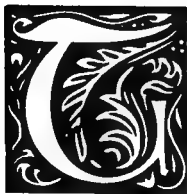
And I walk, returning, over the same path, with my mother, and as I walk I think. "Thus, even what she is to-day, I one day will be. Am I already so grown a woman?"

The procession, the flutes, the nuptial hymn, and the car, decorated with the flowers of the bridegroom, all these fêtes, another night, will be for me, under the branches of the olives.

Even as does, at this hour, my Melissa, I shall unveil myself before a man, I shall also know love in the night, and later little children will suck at my breasts.

XX
CONFIDENCES

[66]



THE next day I went again to see her. We blushed as soon as each saw the other. She led me into her chamber that we might be alone.

I had much to say to her, but in seeing her, I forgot all. I did not dare throw myself upon her neck, and I gazed curiously upon her high-tied sash.

I was astonished that there was no change in her face; she seemed still my friend, and yet, nevertheless, since yesterday she had learned so many things that astonished me.

Impulsively I sat myself upon her knees, and took her in my arms. Quickly, anxious, I whispered in her ear. Then she laid her cheek against mine and told me all.

XXI

THE MOON WITH EYES OF BLUE

[68]



T night the hair of women and the branches of willows are alike. I walked on the bank of the lake. Suddenly I heard singing: then only I knew I was among young girls.

I said to them, "What are you singing?" They replied: "To those who return." One awaited the coming of her father, another her brother; but she who expected her lover was the most impatient.

They had woven for them garlands, and crowns, cut from the branches of palms, and from lotus drawn from the water. They walked with their arms about each other's necks, and sung to one another.


I went my way along the bank of the river sadly, and alone, but in looking about me, I saw that behind the great trees, the moon, with great eyes of blue, escorted me.

XXII

A SONG

(“SHADOW OF THE WOODS”)

[70]

“HADOW of the woods, whence she should come, tell me where is my mistress fled?” — “She has gone down into the fields.” — “Oh, fields, where has my mistress gone?” — “She has followed the banks of the river.”

“Fair river who hast seen her pass, tell me is she near to me?” — “She has left me for the road.” — “Oh, road, seest thou her still?” — “She has left me for the highway.”

“Oh! white highway, highway to the city, tell me where hast thou led her?” — “To the street of gold, which enters into Sardis.” — “Oh! street of light, touchest thou her naked feet?” — “She has entered the palace of the king.”

“Oh! palace! Splendor of the earth, give her back to me!” — “Look! she has collars of gold above her breasts, and golden hoops in her hair, an hundred pearls along her thighs, and two arms around her waist.”

XXIII
LYKAS

[72]



COME, we will go into the fields, under the thickets of juniper; there we will eat honey from the hives, we will make traps for locusts with the stems of asphodels.

Come, we will go and see Lykas, who guards his father's herds under the cliffs of shady Taurus. Surely he will give us milk to drink.

Already I hear the sound of his flute. A skilful player is he. Behold the dogs and the sheep, and he himself erect against a tree. Is he not beautiful as Adonis?

Oh, Lykas! let us have milk. Behold here are figs from our fig-trees. Let us remain with thee. Oh, bearded she-goats, be still, for fear lest you excite the restless bucks.

XXIV

THE OFFERING TO THE GODDESS



It is not for Artemis whom they worship at Perga, this garland woven by my own hands, although Artemis may be a kind goddess, who will watch over me in a difficult labor.

Neither is it for Athena whom they adore at Side, although she may be made of ivory, and of gold, and carries in her hand a pomegranate that tempts the birds.

No, it is for Aphrodite, whom I worship with my whole heart, for she alone can give what my lips long for, if I hang on her sacred tree my garland of tender roses.

But I will never ask aloud for that which I beg her to accord me. I will stretch myself up on the tips of my toes, and I will whisper my secret into a cleft in the bark.

XXV
THE BEDFELLOW

[76]



HE tempest lasted all through the night. Selenis of the beautiful hair came to spin with me. She remained, for fear of the mud, and pressed one against the other, we filled my little bed.

When young girls lie together, sleep stays outside the door. "Bilitis, tell me whom thou lovest?" and she slid her legs between my own, that she might love me tenderly.

And she said to me, between my lips: "I know, Bilitis, whom thou lovest. Close thine eyes, I am Lykas." And I replied, touching her: "Is it not plain to me that thou art a woman? Thou makest merry at an unfitting time."

But she replied: "In very truth, am I Lykas, if thou closest thine eyes. Behold his arms, these are his hands. . . ." And tenderly, softly, in the silence, she enchants my dreams into a singular delusion.

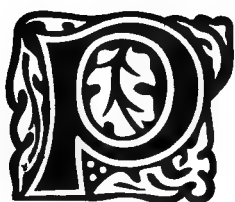
XXVI

A PRAYER TO PERSEPHONE

3

[78]

7



URIFIED by the ritual ablutions,
and dressed in tunics of violet,
we have thrown kisses toward the
earth with our hands filled with
branches of olive.

“ Oh, Persephone, of the under-world, or whatever
may be the name thou desirest, if this name please,
listen to us, oh, thou of the hair of shadows. Sterile
queen, who smileth never.

“ Kokhlis, daughter of Thrasamakos, is sick and
nigh to death. Call her not away to thee. Thou
knowest she cannot escape thee: some day, after
years, thou shalt take her.

“ But lead her not away so soon, oh, Dominatrice
invisible! For she weeps that she is still a virgin,
and she supplicates thee through our prayers. Grant
this and we will give thee, to save her, three black
ewes, unsheared.”

XXVII
THE GAME OF DICE

[80]



S we both love him, for him we have played a game of dice. It was a famous game. There were many young girls to look on.

She threw first the throw "Kyklopes," and I the combination "Solon." Then she the "Kallibolos," and I, feeling myself the loser, prayed to the goddess.

I threw ; I had the "Epiphenon," she, the terrible *coup* of "Chios," I, the "Antiteukos," she, the "Trikiass," and I, the throw of "Aphrodite," and I won the disputed lover.

But seeing her pale, I took her around the neck, and I said to her close to her ear, so that she alone heard me : "Weep not, little friend, we will let him choose between us."

XXVIII
THE DISTAFF

[82]



ALL day long my mother has kept me shut up in the room for the women, with my sisters, whom I do not love, and who speak low among themselves. I, in a corner alone, I turn my distaff.

“Distaff, since I am alone with thee, it is to thee that I will talk. With thy wig of white wool thou art to me like a wise old woman. Listen, then.

“If I could run away, it is not here I would be sitting, in the corner by the wall, and spinning alone. I would be sleeping among the violets on the sunny fields of Taurus.

“Because he is poorer than I, my mother will not let me marry him. But I care not, I say to them, either my marriage day will never come, or it will be his hand that shall lead me over the threshold.”

XXIX
THE PAN - PIPES

•



FOR the day of Hyacinthies, he gave me a pan-pipe (syrinx) made of fine cut reeds, and held together with white wax that is sweet to my lips as honey.

He taught me to play, seated upon his knees, but I was a little timid and trembling. He played after me ; so softly that I could hardly hear him.

We had nothing to say to each other, so much were we absorbed the one with the other ; but our tunes replied to each other, and our lips, turn by turn, touched upon the pipe.

It has grown late ; listen to the song of the green frogs who commence with the night. My mother will never believe me when I say that I have stayed so long searching for my lost sash.

XXX
THE TRESSES

[86]



He said to me, " Last night I dreamed.
Thy locks were swept about my neck.
I had thy hair, like a black necklace,
All about my nape, and spread upon
my breast.

" I kissed it, and it was mine ;
And by it we were bound together for all time ;
With lip upon lip, and intertwining locks,
We were one, like two laurels with one root.

" And little by little it seemed to me,
So were our limbs confused,
I became thyself, and that thou
Entered into me like my thought."

When he had finished speaking,
Softly he laid his hand upon my shoulders,
Into my eyes he gazed so tenderly,
That I lowered my glance, shivering.

XXXI
THE CUP

[88]



YKAS saw me come to him dressed only in a winding scarf, for the day's heat was overpowering, and he wished to model my breast which remained uncovered.

He took fine clay, kneaded in fresh, clean water. Then he pressed it upon my skin. I thought I should faint with the cold touch of the earth.

From my moulded breast, he made a cup, round and umbilicated. He put it to dry in the sun, and tinted it with purple, and ochre, by pressing flowers all about it.

Then we went to the fountain that is consecrated to the nymphs, and we threw the cup in the current, with bunches of pinks.

XXXII
ROSES IN THE NIGHT

[90]



HEN the night mounts into the heavens, the world belongs to us and to the gods. We wander from the fields to the spring, from the dark woods to the glades, or where our naked feet may lead us.

The little stars burn bright enough for such small shadows as we are. Sometimes we find does, sleeping under the low branches.

But more charming in the night than all else, is a place known to us alone, and which attracts us across the forest — a thicket of mysterious wild roses.

For nothing is so divine in all the world, nothing can equal the perfume of roses in the night. How is it that in the days when I had no lover, I never knew their intoxication?

XXXIII
REMORSE

[92]



At first I would not reply, and my shame showed upon my cheeks, and the beating of my heart brought pain to my breasts.

Then I resisted, I told him “No! No!” — I turned my head away, and his kiss did not open my lips, — nor love, my tight-closed knees.

Then he begged me to forgive him, kissed my hair, I felt his burning breath, and he went away.
. . . Now I am alone.

I gaze upon the empty place, the deserted wood, the trampled earth. And I bite my fingers until they bleed, and I stifle my sobs in the grass.

•

XXXIV
THE INTERRUPTED DREAM



ALL alone I lay me down and slept,
like a partridge hidden among the
heather. The light wind, the mur-
muring of the brook, the sweetness
of the night, soothed and held me
there.

Imprudent, I slept, and awakened with a cry. I
struggled, I wept, but already it was too late. What
are the hands of a child able to do?

He would not quit me. Nay, more tenderly he
pressed me in his embrace, against his body, till I saw
neither the earth, nor the trees, but only the light of
his eyes.*

To thee, Kypris victorious, I consecrate these
offerings still moist with the dew, vestiges of the
pains of virginity, witnesses of my sleep, and my
resistance.

XXXV
THE WASHERWOMAN



H washers, tell no one that you have seen me. I confide in you; reveal not my secret! Between my tunic and my breasts I bring you something.

I am like a little frightened bird. . . . I know not if I dare to tell you. . . . My heart beats as though I would die. . . . It is a veil that I bring you.

A veil and the ribbons from my thighs. You see: there is blood upon them. By Apollo, it was in spite of me! I struggled hard: but the man who loves is stronger than we.

Wash them well; spare not the salt nor the chalk. I will place four oboli for you at the feet of Aphrodite. Yes, even a drachma of silver.

XXXVI

SONG

(“ WHEN HE RETURNED ”)

[98]



HEN he returned, I hid my face with my two hands. He said to me: "Fear nothing. Who has seen our kissing?" — "Who has seen us? The night and the moon."

And the stars and the first dawn. The moon looked at her face in the lake and has told it to the water under the willows. The water of the lake has told it to the oar.

And the oar has told it to the boat, and the boat to the fisher. Helas! Helas! if that were all! But the fisher has told it to a woman.

The fisher has told it to a woman. My father and my mother, and my sisters, and all Hellas will know it.

XXXVII

BILITIS

[100]



ONE woman may robe herself in a tunic of white wool. Another dress in a garment of silk and gold. Another covers herself with flowers, with leaves and grapes.

As for me, I take no joy of life except when naked. My lover takes me just as I am; without robes, or jewels, or sandals. Behold me, Bilitis, naked, alone.

My hair is black with its own blackness, my lips are red with their own color. My locks float about me free and round, like feathers.

Take me as my mother made me in a night of love long past; and if I please you thus, forget not to tell me.

XXXVIII
THE LITTLE HOUSE

[102]



THE little house in which is his bed is the prettiest in all the world. It is made with the branches of trees, four walls of dried earth, and a roof of thatch.

I love it, for, since the nights have grown cold, we have slept there together: and the cooler the nights are the longer are they also. When I rise with the coming of the day, even I, find myself weary.

The mattress is upon the ground: two coverlids of black wool cover our bodies, which warm each other. His body presses against my breasts. My heart throbs.

He presses me so closely that he will crush me, poor little girl that I am. But when he is within me, I know nothing more in the world, and they might cut off my limbs without recalling me from my ecstasy.

XXXIX
THE LOST LETTER

[104]



ELAS! Woe is me! I have lost his letter. I put it between my skin and my strophion (girdle of wool), under the warmth of my breast. I ran, it must have fallen.

I will go back, I will retrace my steps. If any one should find it, they will tell it to my mother, and I shall be beaten before my mocking sisters.

If it is a man who has found it, he will give it back to me; or even, should he wish to meet me in secret, I know a means to ravish it from him.

If it is a woman who has read it, O Guardian Zeus, protect me! for she will tell it to all the world, or she will steal my lover from me.

XL
SONG
(“THE NIGHT IS SO PROFOUND”)



HE darkness is so profound, it seems to penetrate my eyes. — Thou shalt not see the way. Thou shalt lose thyself in the forest.


The roar of the waterfalls fills my ears. — Thou shalt not hear the voice of thy lover, though he were but twenty steps from thee.

The odor of the flowers is so strong that I faint and am about to fall. — Thou wouldst not know it even if he crossed thy path.

Ah ! he is indeed far from me, there on the other side of the mountain, but I see him and hear him and feel him as though he touched me.

XLI
THE PLEDGE

[108]

HEN the waters of the rivers shall return to the tops of the snow-clad hills. When the wheat and the grain shall be sowed in the moving furrows of the restless sea.

“When the pines shall spring up out of the lakes, and the lilies shall grow from the rocks, when the sun shall become black, and the moon shall fall upon the green grass of the meadows :

“Then, but then alone, will I take to me another woman, and I will forget thee, O Bilitis ! soul of my life, heart of my heart.”

He has said this to me. He has told me this ! What matters all the rest of the world ? Where will be found a happiness like mine ? Where, unreasoning joy like my joy ?

XLII
NIGHT

[110]



It is I now who go to look for him.
Each night, most softly, I leave the
house and I go by a long path, even
to his field, to see him sleep.

Sometimes I remain a long time without speaking,
happy in seeing him only, and I approach my lips to
his, that I may kiss only his breath.

Then quickly I throw myself upon him. He
awakes in my arms, and he cannot rise, for I struggle
against him. He resigns himself, laughs, and em-
braces me. Thus we play in the night.

First light of day, O wicked light, thou so
soon! In what ever darkened cave, in what subter-
ranean field, can we love so long, that we shall lose
remembrance of thee . . . ?

XLIII
CRADLE SONG

[112]



SLEEP! I have sent to Sardis for thy
toys, and for thy robes to Babylon.
Sleep! thou art daughter of Bilitis
and of a king of the eastern sun.

The woods, they are palaces that they build for
thee alone, and which I give to thee. The trunks
of the pines, they are the columns, the high branches,
they are the vaulted roof.

Sleep! lest he should wake thee, I will sell the
sun to the sea. The wind of the wings of a dove is
less light than thy breath.

Daughter of mine, flesh of my flesh, thou shalt
say, when thou openest thine eyes, if thou wilt have
the plain or the city, the mountains or the moon, or
the white procession of the gods.

XLIV
THE TOMB OF THE NAIADS



LONG through the woods covered with hoar frost, I walk ; my hair before my lips glistens with little icicles, and my sandals are heavy with clinging and heaped-up snow.

He said to me : "What seekest thou?" "I follow the tracks of a satyr. His little forked foot-prints alternate like the holes in a white mantle." But he said to me : "The satyrs are dead."

"The satyrs, and the nymphs also. For twenty years there has been no such terrible winter. The print thou seest is that of a buck. But let us rest here, where their tomb is."

And with the iron of his hoe he broke the crystal ice of the spring where once laughed the naiads. He lifted the green cold masses, and raising them toward the pale heavens, he gazed about him.

II

ELEGIACS IN MYTILÈNE

Let fruit be crushed on fruit, let flower on flower,
Breast kindle breast and either burn one hour.
Why wilt thou follow lesser loves ? are thine
Too weak to bear these hands and lips of mine ?
— A. C. SWINBURNE.

Εὐμορφότερα Μνασιδίκα τᾶς ἀπαλᾶς Γυρινῶς
— SAPPHO.

In translating the above phrase I have preferred to give a translation of the complete paragraph in which it occurs, and which should read as follows : “ She is wonderfully sweet and gentle, Gyrinno, but her disdain has thrown me into the arms of the beautiful Mnais.”

XLV
ON THE SHIP

[118]



BEAUTIFUL ship that hast brought
me here, coasting the shore of Ionia,
I abandon thee to the glistening
waves, and with a light foot I spring
upon the shore.

Thou shalt return to the land where the virgin is
the friend of the nymphs. Forget not to thank those
invisible counsellors, and take to them from me this
branch, plucked with my own hands.

Thou wast once a pine, and upon the mountains,
and thy huge branches and thy squirrels and birds
were shaken by the hot southerly wind (Notos).

May (Boreus) the north wind be thy guide, and
urge thee softly toward thy port, black nave, escorted
by dolphins, at the pleasure of the kindly sea.

XLVI
SAPPHO

[120]



RUB my eyes. . . . It is already day, I believe. Ah! who is this near me? . . . a woman? By Paphia, I had forgotten. . . . Oh, Charites! how ashamed am I. .

To what country have I come, and what is this isle, where one learns thus to love? If I were not utterly weary, I should believe it some dream. Can it be possible that this is *the* Sappho!

She sleeps. . . . Surely she is beautiful, although her hair is cut short like that of an athlete. But this strange face, this virile bosom, and these narrow hips.

I would like to go away before she wakes. Helas! I am at the side next the wall. I must straddle over her. I am afraid lest I touch her thigh, and that she will seize me as I cross her.

XLVII
THE DANCE OF GLOTTIS AND KYSE



WO little girls lead me to their home,
and as soon as the door is closed,
they light the wick of the lamp, and
would dance for me.

Their cheeks, unpainted, are as brown as their
little bellies. They lead each other by the arms,
talking at the same time in an agony of gaiety.

Seated upon a mattress that rests upon two raised
trestles, Glottis sings with a clear voice, and beats the
time with her little sonorous hands.

Kysé dances in jumps, then stops, strangling with
laughter, and taking her sister by the breasts, bites
her on the shoulder and throws her over, like a kid
that wishes to play.

XLVIII
ADVICE

[124]



HEN Syllikhmas entered, and seeing us so familiar, seated herself on the settle. She took Glottis upon one knee, Kysé upon the other, and said :

“Come here, little one.” But I remained where I was. She continued, “Hast thou fear of us? Draw near. These children love thee. They will teach thee something thou knowest not : the honey of the caresses of women.”

“Man is violent and lazy. Thou knowest that without doubt. Shun him. He has a flat breast, harsh skin, coarse locks, and hairy arms. But women are beautiful in every part.”

“Women only know how to love ; stay here with us, Bilitis, stay. And if thou hast an ardent soul, thou shalt see thy beauty as in a mirror, upon the bodies of women who love thee.”

XLIX
UNCERTAINTY

[126]



HETHER Glottis or Kysé, I know not which I should espouse. As they are not alike, the one will not console me for the other, and I am afraid to choose.

Each one of them holds one of my hands, and has one of my breasts also. But to which shall I give my lips? To which shall I give my heart and all else of me of which one can partake?

It is a disgrace for us thus to remain, all three together in one house. People talk of it in Mytilène. Yesterday before the temple of Ares, no woman who passed gave me greeting.

It is Glottis whom I prefer; but I cannot cast Kysé aside. What would become of her all alone? Shall I let them both go as they were, and take to me another friend?

L
THE MEETING



HAVE found her as one had found
a treasure, in a field, under a clump
of myrtle, enveloped from head to
foot in a peplos of yellow, embroid-
ered with blue.

“I have no friend,” she said to me; “for the
nearest city is forty stadia from here. I live alone
with my mother, who is a widow, and always sad.
If thou wishest I will follow thee.

“I will follow thee even to thy house, were it at
the other end of the island, and I will live with thee,
even until thou sendest me away. Thy hand is soft
and thine eyes are blue.

“Come, let us away. I will take nothing with
me except it be this little naked Astarte that is hung
to my necklace. We will put it near to thine, and
we will offer to them both roses, in recompense for
each night.”

LI
THE LITTLE TERRA-COTTA IMAGE
OF ASTARTE



HE little guardian Astarte, which protects Mnasidika, was modelled at Camiros by a skilful potter. It is as long as one's thumb, and made of fine yellow clay.

Its hair falls and spreads out upon its squared shoulders. Its eyes are long and wide, and its mouth very small. For it is an image of the "All Beautiful."

With its right hand it points to its delta, which is worked like hair, with small holes upon the lower body, and along the groins. For it is an image of the "Most Amorous One."

With its left hand it sustains its breasts, which are heavy and round. Between its widened hips protrudes a fecund belly. For it is an image of "The Mother of All Things."

LII
DESIRE

[132]



HE entered, and passionately, the eyes half closed, she fixed her lips to mine, and our tongues touched each other. . . . Never in my life have I had a kiss like that one.

She stood erect before (against) me, full of love and consentment. One of my knees, little by little, mounted between her hot thighs, which gave way as though to a lover.

My wandering hand upon her tunic sought to divine the naked body, which softly bent like waves, or arching, stiffened itself with shiverings of the skin.

With her eyes in delirium she signs toward the bed: but we have not the right to indulge our love before the ceremony of the wedding, and brusquely we separate.

LIII
THE WEDDING

[134]



THE next day they laid the wedding feast in the house of Acalanthis, whom she had adopted as her mother. Mnasidika wore the white veil and I the man's tunic.

And then, in the presence of twenty women, she put on her robes of fête. Perfumed with Bakkaris (elecampane), powdered with powder of gold, her cool and delicate skin attracted furtive hands.

In her chamber filled with greenery, she has awaited me like a spouse. And I have set her on a car between me and the (nymphagogue) guardian of the bride. One of her little breasts burned in my hand.

They have sung the nuptial song, and the flutes have played it also. I have carried Mnasidika under the shoulders and under the knees, and we have crossed the threshold covered with roses.

LIV
THE PAST THAT STILL LIVES

[136]



WILL leave the bed as she has left it, unmade and rumpled, the covers wrinkled, in order that the imprint of her form may remain by the side of mine.

Until to-morrow I will not go to the bath, I will not wear my clothing, and I will not comb my hair, for fear lest I efface one of her caresses.

I will eat neither this morning nor this evening, and upon my lips I will put neither rouge nor powder, in order that her kisses may remain.

I will leave the shades closed, and I will not open the door, for fear lest the memory she has left behind should fly away on the wind.

LV
THE METAMORPHOSIS

[138]



ONCE I was amorous of the beauty of young men, and the memory of their words once kept me from sleep.

I remember to have carved a name in the bark of a plane-tree. I remember to have left a bit of my tunic in a path where a certain one might pass.

I remember once to have loved. . . . Oh, Panny-chis, my babe, in what hands have I left thee? How, oh, unhappy one, have I abandoned thee?

To-day, and forever, Mnasidika alone possesses me. Let her receive as a sacrifice the happiness of them I have deserted for her.

LVI
THE TOMB WITHOUT A NAME

[140]



NASIDIKA having taken me by the hand, led me without the gates of the city, to an uncultivated field where stood a stele¹ of marble. And she said to me: "This was the lover of my mother."

Then I felt a great shiver: and still holding her by the hand, I leaned upon her shoulder in order to read the four verses between the serpent and the broken cup.

"It is not Death who has taken me away, but the nymphs of the fountains. I repose here under the light earth with the severed locks of Xantho. Let her alone weep for me. I tell not my name."

A long time we stood, and we poured out no libation. For how were we to call upon an unknown soul from the throngs of Hades?

¹ A gravestone or column.

LVII

THE THREE BEAUTIES OF MNASIDIKA

[142]



IN order that Mnasidika may be protected of the gods, I have sacrificed to laughter-loving Aphrodite two male hares and two doves.

And I have sacrificed to Ares two cocks spurred for the fight, and to the perverse Hecate two dogs who howled under the knife.

It is not without reason that I have implored these three immortals, for Mnasidika carries upon her face the reflection of their triple divinity.

Her lips are red like copper, her hair blue-black like iron, and her eyes are like the blackness of silver.

LVIII
THE CAVE OF THE NYMPHS

[144]



HY feet are more delicate than those of silver Thetis. Between thy crossed arms thou pressest thy breasts together, and cradlest them softly like the beautiful bodies of two doves.

Under thy hair thou hidest thy limpid eyes, thy trembling mouth, and the flowers of thine ears; but nothing stops my gaze, nor the warm breath of my kiss.

For in the secret place of thy body, 'tis thou, Mnasidika beloved, who hidest the cave of the nymphs of which old Homer spoke, the place where the Naiads weave the linen of purple.

The place where run, drop by drop, the inexhaustible springs, and from which the gate of the North lets men descend, and the gate of the South lets Immortals enter.

LIX
MNASIDIKA'S BREASTS



IMIDLY, she with one hand opened her tunic and stretched out to me her warm, soft breasts, even as one offers to the goddess a pair of living turtle-doves.

“Caress them,” she said to me, “I love them so! They are dear things, little babes. I amuse myself with them when I am alone. I play with them, I give them pleasure.

“I douche them with milk, I powder them with flowers. My fine hair, which dries them, is dear to their little points. I caress them with trembling. I couch them in linen.

“Since I shall never have children, be their nourishment my love, and since they are so far from my lips, give them kisses for me.”

LX
THE DOLL

[148]



HAVE given to her a little doll. A doll of wax with rosy cheeks. Its arms are attached by little pegs, and its legs are movable.

When we are together she puts it to bed between us, and plays it is our infant. At night she caresses it, and gives it the breast, then she goes to sleep.

She has made for it three little tunics, and we buy jewels for it the day of the fête of Aphrodite. Yes, jewels and flowers also.

She watches over its virtue, and never allows it to go out without her, especially when the sun shines, for then the little doll would melt away in drops of wax.

LXI
ENDEARMENTS

[150]



LOSE softly thine arms about me like
a girdle. Oh, touch, touch my skin
thus! Neither water, nor the breath
of the south wind are softer than thy
hand.

To-day endear me, little sister, it is thy turn.
Remember thou the endearments that I taught thee
last night, and kneel thou near to me who am
fatigued; kneel thou in silence.

Thy lips descend upon my lips. All thine un-
done hair follows them, as a caress follows a kiss.
Thy locks glide upon my left breast; they hide thine
eyes.

Give me thy hand, it is hot! Press mine and
leave it not. Hands better than lips unite, and their
passion is equalled by nothing.

LXII
GAMES

[152]



ORE than her balls or her doll, I am for her a game. With all the parts of my body, during the long hours, she amuses herself like a child, without speaking.

She takes down my hair and dresses it again, according to her own caprice, sometimes knotted under the chin like a thick stuff, or turns it into loops, or coils it up even to a point.

With astonishment she admires the color of my lashes and the folds of my neck. Sometimes she makes me kneel, and lays her hands upon the plaits of my tunic.

And then — it is one of her games — she slips her little head under my robe, and imitates the trembling kid that sucks from the udder of its mother.

LXIII
IN THE SHADOWS

[154]



UNDER the coverlid of transparent linen we have slipped, she and I. Even our heads were hidden, and the lamp shone through the fabric above us.

Thus I viewed her dear body under a mysterious light. We were nearer the one to the other, more free, more loving, more naked. . . . "In the same chemise," she said.

We had left our hair arranged in order to be more uncovered, and in the close air of the bed there rose up the odors of two women ; of two natural cassolets.

Nothing in the world, not even the lamp has seen us that night. Which one of us was loved, she alone and I can ever tell. But the men, they knew nothing of it.

LXIV
THE SLEEPER

[156]



HE sleeps with her hair all fallen down about her, her hands clasped together behind her neck. Does she dream? Her mouth is open, and she breathes softly.

With a piece of swansdown I wipe away the sweat of her arms and the fever of her lips, without awakening her. Her closed eyelids are like two blue flowers.

Gently and silently I will rise. I will go and draw the water, and milk the cow, and beg some fire of the neighbors. My hair shall be done, and I shall be dressed when she shall open her eyes.

Sleep, lie long between her beautiful curved eyelashes, and prolong the happy night with a dream of good fortune.

LXV
THE KISS

[158]



WOULD kiss the whole length of the rich black locks that grace thy neck like wings; oh! sweet bird, oh! captured dove, whose passion-filled heart beats under my hand.

I would take thy lips between mine own, as a babe takes the breast of its mother. Tremble!— Thrill! Sweet one,—my kisses reach far, and should satisfy thy love.

Lightly will I touch thy breasts and arms with my tongue and lips, and behind thine ears, and upon thy neck I will leave the marks of my kisses; and while I kiss thee my hands shall stray in mad delight over the ivory nakedness of thy sensitive body, trembling under the touch of my nails.

Listen, Mnasidika! Hear the murmuring of my love in thine ears, like the wild humming of the sea. Mnasidika, thy look drives me mad; I will close thy burning eyes with a kiss, as if they were thy lips.

LXVI
JEALOUS THOUGHTS

[160]



THOU needst not dress thine hair,
for fear lest the hot iron scorch thy
neck, or burn thy black locks. Thou
shouldst let it hang upon thy shoul-
ders and spread out over the length
of thine arms.

Thou needst not dress thyself, lest thy close
girdle should redden the folds of the skin over thy
hips. Better shouldst thou rest naked like a little
girl.

It is not even best that thou shouldst rise, for
fear that thy delicate feet should be bruised in walk-
ing. Thou shouldst repose in thy bed, oh victim
of Eros, and I will dress thy poor wound.

For I could not bear to see upon thy body other
marks, Mnasidika, than the purple of a kiss too long
prolonged, the trace of a sharp nail, or the reddening
line of my passionate embrace.

LXVII
THE DESPAIRING EMBRACE

[162]



LOVE me, not with smiles, or with
flutes, or with the plaited flowers,
but with thy heart and with thy
tears, even as I love thee with my
sorrowing breast, and my moans.

When thy breasts alternate with my breasts, when
I feel thy life touch my life, when thy knees stand up
behind me, then my panting mouth knows not more
how to join itself to thine.

Press me to thee as I press thee to me! See, the
lamp has died down; the darkness is upon us; but
I press thy moving body, and I hear thy perpetual
plaint.

Moan! Moan! oh, woman! Eros leads us in
sorrow. Thou shalt suffer less when thou liest
upon a bed to bring a child into the world, than
when thou givest birth to thy love.

LXVIII
MY HEART

[i64]



REATHLESS, I take her hand and press it with force upon the moist skin of my left breast. And I turn my head here and there, and move my lips without speaking.

My excited heart, rude and hard, beats and beats within my bosom, even as an imprisoned satyr knocks when bound in a leathern sack. She says to me, "Thy heart pains thee . . ."

"O Mnasidika," I reply, "a woman's heart is not there. That is a poor bird, a dove that beats its feeble wings. The heart of a woman is a thing more terrible.

"Like a little bunch of myrtle it burns in a red flame, and pours out abundant juice in foam. It is there that I feel myself bitten by voracious Aphrodite."

LXIX
CONFIDENCES IN THE NIGHT

[166]



E doze, the eyes closed; profound is the silence about our couch. Oh, the ineffable nights of summer! But she, who believes me sleeping, lays her hot hand upon my arm.

She murmurs: "Bilitis, thou sleepest?" My heart throbs, but, without reply, I breathe regularly, like a woman deep couched in dreams. Then she begins to speak.

"Since thou hearest me not, ah! how I love thee!" And she repeats my name: "Bilitis . . . Bilitis . . ." and she touches me lightly with the tips of her trembling fingers.

"It is mine, her mouth. Yes, mine alone! And is there another like it in the world? Ah! my joy, my happiness! Those naked arms are mine, and mine this neck and hair."

LXX
ABSENCE

[168]



HE has gone out, she is far from me,
but I see her, for all things in the
room, all pertain to her, and I, like
all the rest.

This bed still warm, over which I let my lips
wander, is disordered with the imprint of her form.
Upon this soft cushion has lain her little head en-
veloped in its wealth of hair.

This basin is that in which she hath bathed ; this
comb has penetrated the knots of her tangled locks.
These slippers beg for her naked feet. These pockets
of gauze contained her breasts.

But what I dare not touch, is the mirror in which
she gazed upon her hot bruises, and where perhaps
remains still the reflection of her moist lips.

LXXI

LOVE

[170]



ELAS! If I think of her my throat grows dry, I bow my head, my breasts grow hard and pain me, I shiver, and I weep as I walk.

If I see her my heart stops beating, my hands tremble, my feet grow cold, and a blush mounts to my cheeks, my temples beat painfully.

If I touch her, folly overwhelms me, my arms become weak, my knees fail me. I fall before her, and lay me down like a woman who is about to die.

Everything she says to me seems to wound me. Her love is a torture, and the passers-by hear my complaints. . . . Helas! How can I call her my "Well-Beloved?"

LXXII
PURIFICATION

[172]



THOU art there ! Take off thy bandal-
ettes, and thy pins and thy tunics.
Strip even to thy sandals, even to
the ribbons of thy thighs, even to
the sash under thy breasts.

Wash the black from thine eyebrows, and the
rouge from thy lips. Efface the powder from thy
shoulders, and wash thy hair in the water.

For I wish to have thee all pure, just as thou
layest, new born, at the feet of thy mother, before
the eyes of thy proud father.

So chaste that my hand in thy hand will make
thee blush even to the lips, and that a word from me
in thine ear shall reallume thy wandering eyes.

LXXIII
THE CRADLE OF MNASIDIKA

[174]



Y little girl, so few years that I have had nought but thee, I love thee, not as a lover, but as if thou hadst been born of my laboring womb.

When extended upon my knees, thy two frail arms about me, thou seekest my breast, thy lips apart and my nipples pressing softly within their trembling touch.

It is then I dream that in some far off year, really I have nursed this moist mouth, supple and dripping; this purple vase of myrrh in which the happiness of Bilitis is mysteriously enclosed.

Sleep then ; I will cradle thee with thy head upon my knee, which shall raise and rock thee. Sleep thus. I will sing for thee the little crooning songs that put to sleep the new-born.

LXXIV

A PROMENADE BY THE SEA

[176]



As we were walking together upon the beach, silent and wrapped up to our chins with our mantles of dark wool, a party of merry young girls passed by.

“Ah! it is Bilitis and Mnasidika! Look! See the pretty little squirrel that we have caught. It is timid as a bird and gentle as a rabbit.

“We shall take it to Lydia, we will put it in a cage and will give it plenty of milk with leaves of lettuce. It is a female and it will live a long time.”

And the little fools ran away. As for us, we, without speaking, seated ourselves, I upon a rock, she upon the sand, and we gazed upon the sea.

LXXV
“THE OBJECT”

[178]



GOOD health, Bilitis; Mnasidika, good good health.— Be seated. How is your husband?— Too well. Tell him not that you have seen me. He would kill me if he knew I had been here.— Have no fear.

And this is your chamber? and this your bed? Pardon me, I am curious.— Yet thou knowest well the bed of Myrrhiné.— So little.— It is said to be beautiful.— And lascivious, oh, my dear! But let us speak no more of it.

What do you wish of me?— That thou shouldst lend me.— Speak! What is it?— I dare not name the object.— We have not one of them.— Truly?— Mnasidika is a virgin.— Then where can one buy it?— At the leather workers.

Tell me also, where do you buy your embroidery silk? Mine breaks if one but looks at it.— I make mine myself, but Nais sells it, and of excellent quality.— At what price?— Three oboli.— It is dear. And the “ Thing ”?— Two drachmas.— Adieu.

LXXVI
AN EVENING BY THE FIRE

[180]



THE winter is cold, Mnasidika. All is cold outside our bed. Rise, then, come with me, for I have lit a great fire with dead twigs and with split branches.

We will warm ourselves kneeling, all naked, our hair hanging upon our backs, and we will drink milk together from the same cup, and we will eat cakes with honey.

How gay and noisy is the flame! Art thou not too near? Thy skin becomes red. Let me kiss it wherever the fire has made it burning.

In the midst of the firebrands I will heat the iron and will dress thine hair here. With the charred splinters I will write thy name upon the wall.

LXXVII
QUESTIONS

[182]



HAT do you wish? If it must be, I will sell my last jewels in order that an attentive slave shall satisfy the desire of thine eyes, shall quench the thirst of thy lips.

If the milk of our goat seem insipid to thee, I will hire for thee, as for an infant, a nurse with swollen breasts who each morning shall nurse thee.

If our bed seems hard to thee, I will buy all the soft cushions, all the coverlids of silk, all the drapery of furs and feathers of the Amathusian merchants.

All. But I should suffice to thee, and should we sleep upon the earth, earth should with me be softer than the warm bed of any stranger.

LXXVIII
HER EYES
,



REAT eyes of Mnasidika, how happy
ye make me when love blackens thy
pupils, animates thee or darkens thee
under thy tears.

How ye madden me when ye turn to others,
drawn away by women who pass, or by a memory
that is not mine.

Then my cheeks contract, my hands tremble, and
I suffer. . . . It seems to me that from all my
parts, and before you, my life flees away.

Great eyes of Mnasidika, cease not to look upon
me ! Else will I stab thee with my needle, and never
more shall ye see ought save the terrible night.

LXXIX

FARDS

[186]



ALL, all my life, the world and men,
all that is not she, to me is nothing.
All that is not she, I give to thee,
O passer-by.

Does she know the labor I have accomplished in
order to be beautiful in her eyes, the work I have
done with my coiffure and with my fards, with my
robes and perfumes?

As long a time would I turn the spindle; I
would labor at the oar or I would plow the field, if
at such a price I could keep her here.

But may it be that she shall never know, O god-
desses who watch over us. The day that she shall
learn that I love her she will seek another woman.

LXXX
THE SILENCE OF MNASIDIKA

[188]



HE had laughed all through the day, and even she had sometimes mocked at me. She had refused to obey me even before many strange women.


When we returned, I affected not to speak to her, and as she threw herself upon my neck, saying, "Thou art angry at me?" I said to her :

"Ah! Thou art no more as in the past, thou art no more as thou wast the first day. I would not know thee, Mnasidika." And she answered not a word.

But she put on all her jewels, even those which she had not worn for a long time, and the same yellow robe brodered with blue, that she wore on the first day of our meeting.

LXXXI
A SCENE

[190]

“ HERE wast thou?” “At the flower market. I have bought some very beautiful lilies. Here they are, I have brought them to you.” “It has taken thee so long a time to buy four flowers?” “The flower-girl detained me.”

“Thy cheeks are pale and thine eyes are glistening.” “It is the fatigue of the journey.” “Thine hair is tangled and moist.” “It is the heat, and the wind that has blown my hair almost down.”

“Thy cincture has been untied; I tied the knot myself, more loosely than this one.” “So loosely that it fell apart; a slave who passed retied it for me.”

“There is a stain upon thy robe.” “It is the water from the flowers that fell upon it.” “Mnasidika, my little soul, thy lilies are the most beautiful there are in all Mytilene.” “That I know well. That I know well.”

LXXXII
WAITING

[192]



THE sun has passed the whole of the night among the dead while I wait for her, seated upon my bed, weak with watching. The wick of the exhausted lamp has burned even to the end.

She will never come again — the last star fades. I know she will never return. I know even the name that I hate. Nevertheless I wait still.

Oh, that she would come now! Yes, that she would come, her hair disordered and without roses, her robes rumpled, soiled, and awry, her tongue dry, and her eyelids black!

As soon as she shall open the door, I will say to her . . . But, here she is . . . It is her robe that I shall touch. Her hands. Her hair. Her skin! I kiss her with unquestioning lips, and I weep.

LXXXIII
SOLITUDE

[194]



OR whom shall I paint my lips?

For whom shall I polish my nails?

For whom shall I perfume my hair?

For whom are my breasts powdered with rouge,
If they shall no more tempt her?
For whom are my arms washed with milk,
If they may never more embrace her?

How shall I ever sleep?
How can I ever go to my bed?
This evening my hand, in all my couch,
Has not felt the warm touch of hers.

I dread to return to my home,
To the room so frightfully bare.
I dare not reopen the door,
I even dare not reopen my eyes.

LXXXIV
A LETTER

[196]



HAT is impossible, impossible. I supplicate thee upon my knees, with tears, all the tears I have wept over this horrible letter, do not abandon me thus.

Think how terrible 'tis to lose thee for the second time, after having had the joy so great of hoping to reconquer thee. Ah, my passion! Wilt thou never know to what point I have loved thee?

Listen to me. Consent to see me once more. Wilt thou not to-morrow, at the setting of the sun, be before thy portal? To-morrow, or the day following? I will come to take thee away. Do not refuse me that.

'Tis the last time perhaps. Let it be. But at least again this time, again this time! I demand it of thee, I beg it of thee, and thou shouldst remember that upon thy reply depends the rest of my life.

LXXXV
THE ATTEMPT

[198]



THOU wast jealous of us, Gyrinno, too passionate child. How many garlands hast thou hung at the knocker of our door! Thou attendedst us in the passage, and followedst us in the streets.

Now, thou art, according to thy vow, reclining upon the loved spot, with thine head upon the cushion about which floats another odor of woman. Thou art larger than she was. Thy body, so different, startles me.

Look! I have at last given myself to thee. Yes, it is I. Thou canst play with my breasts, caress my body, and open my knees. My whole being is given to thy indefatigable lips, — Alas!

Ah! Gyrinno! with love my tears overflow my lips! Dry them with thy hair, do not kiss them, dear one: but hold me closer still and control my trembling.

LXXXVI
THE STRIVING

[200]



GAIN! Enough of sighs and of stretching arms! Commence again! Thinkest thou that love lies in repose? Gyrinno, love is a task, and of all tasks the most rude.

Awaken then! Thou mayest not sleep! What to me are thy blue lids and the bar of pain that burns thy thin thighs? Astarte seethes in my loins.

We lay down together before the twilight, behold already the wicked dawn; but I am not exhausted with so little. I will not sleep before the second night.

I will not sleep: and thou mayest not sleep. Oh, how bitter is the taste of the morning! Gyrinno, taste it! The ecstasies are more difficult, but stranger, and more soft.

LXXXVII
GYRINNO

[202]




BELIEVE not that I have ever loved thee. I have eaten thee as I would a ripe fig, I have drank thee as I would drink hot water, I have carried thee about me like a belt of skin.

I have amused myself with thy body because thou hast short hair and pointed breasts upon thy thin chest, and black nipples like two little dates.

Just as one must have water and fruit, a woman is also necessary, but already I have forgotten thy name, thou, who hast passed between my arms like the shadow of another adored one.

Between thy flesh and mine a burning dream has possessed me. I pressed thee upon me as though upon a wound, and I cried, Mnasidika ! Mnasidika ! Mnasidika !

LXXXVIII
THE LAST EFFORT

“HAT do you wish, old woman?” —
“To console thee.” —
“’Tis trouble lost.” —
“They have told me that since thy parting thou fliest from love to love, without finding peace or forgetfulness. I come to offer thee some one.”

“Speak.” —

“It is a young girl-slave born at Sardis. She has not her equal in the world, for she is at the same time man and woman, although her breasts, her long locks, and her clear voice produce all the illusions.”

“Her age?” —

“Sixteen years.” —

“Her form?” —

“Large and fine. She has known no one here save Psappha, who loves her madly, and would buy her of me for twenty minae. If thou wouldst hire her, thou canst have her.”

“And what will I do with her?”

“Behold, twenty and two nights that I seek in vain to escape from my memories — Done! I will try yet this one, but you must warn her, — the poor little one, — lest she be afraid, should I sob in her arms.”

LXXXIX
THE TORTURES OF REMEMBRANCE

[206]



REMEMBER (at what hour of the day is it not before my eyes!), I remember the way in which she lifted up her hair with her long fingers, so white.

I recall the night that she passed, her cheek upon my breast, so softly, so sweetly, that happiness kept me awake, and in the morning she had upon her face the impress of my rounded nipple.

I see her holding her cup of milk, and looking at me from the corner of her eyes with a smile. I see her powdered and with her hair dressed, opening her great eyes before her mirror, and retouching with her finger the red of her lips.

And above all, if my despair is perpetual torture, it is because I know, moment by moment, how she gives herself up in the arms of another, and what she demands of her, and what she gives again.

XC
TO THE WAX DOLL

[208]



DOLL of wax, loved plaything that she
called her babe, she has forgotten thee
also, and has left thee as she has me,
who, when with her, was thy father or
thy mother, I know not which.

The pressure of her lips has wounded thy little
cheeks, and on thy left hand behold the broken finger
for which she wept so much. This little cyclas that
thou wearest, 'twas she embroidered it for thee.

And she said that thou couldst read. Although
thou wast never weaned, and at night, bending over
thee, she opened her tunic and gave thee the breast,
“in order that thou shouldst not cry,” she said.

Little doll, if I wished to see her again, I would
give thee to Aphrodite as the most precious of my
possessions. But I would rather think she is dead
forever.

XCI
A FUNERAL CHANT

[210]



ING now a funeral chant, muses of
Mytilene, sing! the earth is sombre
as a mourning garment, and the yellow
trees tremble like shaken locks of hair.

Heraios! oh, sad and sorrowful month! the
leaves fall softly like the snow, the sun no longer
penetrates the forest no longer illumined. No more
I hear aught save the silence.

Behold, they have carried Pittakos to the tomb,
overloaded with years. How many are dead whom
I have known. And she, who still lives, is for me
as if she lived no longer.

This is the tenth time that I have seen the
Autumn die upon this little plain. It is time that
I also passed away. Weep with me, muses of
Mytilene, weep upon my steps.

III

EPIGRAMS IN THE ISLAND OF KYPROS

“But for me the chaplets of hyacinths, the pleasing flutes, the saffron robes, the perfumes, and the blooming fields,
Soft-voiced Myrtilla, and jovial Bacchus, and the sport with virgins in the darkened caves.”

— PHILODEMES.

“The spectacles were strange ; there were games in which one saw crowds of naked young girls taking part in all the exercises, wearing only a simple belt ; at the celebrated fête of Maïouma, troops of courtesans bathed in public in the basins of the fountains filled with limpid water. It was like an intoxication, like a dream of Sardanapalus, in which passed before the eyes, pêle-mêle, all the pleasures, all the debauches, not excepting certain curious perversions.”

— ERNEST RENAN.

XCII
HYMN TO THE ASTARTE

[214]



OTHER inexhaustible, incorruptible,
creatrix, first-born, self-conceived, self-
created, enjoyed of thyself alone and
issue of thyself, Astarte !

Oh, perpetually fecund, oh, virgin and nurse
of all, chaste and lascivious one, pure and wanton,
ineffable, nocturnal, soft, breather of fire, foam of
the sea !

Thou who accordest thy grace in secret, thou
who unitest, thou who lovest, thou who fillest the
unending races of savage beasts with furious desire,
and joinest the sexes in the forests !

Oh, Astarte irresistible, hear me ; take me, pos-
sess me, oh, Moon, and thirteen times each year
draw from my privities the libation of my blood.

XCIII
HYMN TO THE NIGHT



THE black masses of the trees are still and as immovable as the mountains. The stars are strewn all across the immense sky. A warm wind like a human breath caresses my eyes and my cheeks.

Oh, Night, thou who givest birth to the gods! how sweet thou art upon my lips! how warm thou art in my hair! how now thou enterest into me, and how I feel myself pregnant with all thy spring-time.

The flowers that shall bloom shall all be born of me. The wind that blows is my breath. The perfume that passes is my desire. All the stars are in my eyes.

4

Thy voice, is it the murmur of the sea? Is it the silence of the plain? Thy voice, I understand it not, but it bends my head to my feet, and my tears wash my two hands.

XCIV
THE MENADES

¶

[218]



THROUGH the forests that look out upon the sea, the Menades are rushing. Maskalé, with hot breasts, runs shrieking, brandishing a phallos of sycamore, smeared with vermillion.

In their mantles¹ of fox skin, and crowned with twigs and fruit of the vine, running, crying, leaping, castanets rattling in their hands, and their staves splitting the heads of the ringing drums.

With wetted hair, with agile legs, with tossing and reddened breasts, their cheeks wet with sweat, their lips in foam, they offer thee, O Dionysos, the love thou hast thrown within them.

And the wind of the sea lifts toward heaven the red hair of Heliokomis, twisting her locks like the furious flame upon a torch of white wax.

¹ Bassaris.

XCV
THE SEA OF KYPRIS

[220]



PON the highest promontory I lay
me down flat upon my face. The
sea was black as a field of violets.
The milky way poured itself out from
the divine breast.

A thousand Menades slept about me among the
crushed flowers. The long grass mingled with their
hair. And then, behold, the sun rose out of the
eastern waters.

They were the same waters, and it was the same
coast that once saw appear the white body of
Aphrodite. Quickly I hid my eyes in my hands.

For I had seen a thousand little lips of light
tremble upon the water; the pure "*sex*," or the
smile of Kypri^s Philommeïdes.

XCVI
THE PRIESTESSES OF ASTARTE

[222]



THE priestesses of Astarte make love at the hour of the rising moon; then they rise and bathe in a huge basin edged with silver.

With their curved fingers, they comb their hair, and their hands, tinted with purple, tangled in their black locks, seem like branches of coral in a dark and flowing sea.

They remove not the hair from their bodies, so that the triangle of the goddess marks their bellies like a temple, but they paint themselves with little brushes and perfume themselves freely.

The priestesses of Astarte make love at the setting of the moon; then in a carpeted hall where burns a lamp of gold, they lie together in sleep.

XCVII
THE MYSTERIES

[224]



IN the thrice mysterious temple into which men never enter, we have fêted thee, Astarte of the Night, Mother of the World, Fountain of Life of the Gods.

Some things I will reveal, but no more than is permitted. About a phallos, crowned, an hundred women dance with shouts and cries. The initiated are in the dress of men, the others in divided tunics.

The smoke of perfumes, the fumes of torches, float among us like a cloud. I weep with burning tears. All, at the feet of the Berbeia¹ we cast ourselves upon our backs.

At last when the pious act is accomplished, and when into the Unique Triangle has been plunged the purple Phallos, then the mystery commences: but I will tell no more.

¹ Pearl-born (Aphrodite).

XCVIII
THE EGYPTIAN COURTESANS

[226]



WITH Plango, I have been among the Egyptian courtesans, high up in the old city. They have amphoras of clay, dishes of copper, and mats of yellow rushes upon which they squat without fatigue.

Their chambers are still, without angles and without corners, so much have the couches of blue limestone smoothed off the pillars, and rounded the base of the walls.

They sit immovable, their hands laid upon their knees. When they offer porridge, they murmur, "Happiness to you," and when we thank them, they say, "Through your kindness."

They understand the Greek and pretend to speak it badly, so that they may laugh at us in their own tongue: but we—a tooth for a tooth—we speak Lydian, and they are quickly abashed.

XCIX

I SING OF MY FLESH AND MY LIFE

[228]



SURELY I will not sing of famous lovers of the past. If they are no more, why speak of them? Am I not like unto them? Have I not enough to do to think of myself?

Pasiphae, I will forget thee, although thy passion was extreme. Syrinx, I will not praise thee, nor thee, Byblis, nor — by the goddess chosen before all — thee, O Helene of the white arms.

If any among ye have suffered, I feel it not. If any of ye have loved, I have loved more. I sing of my flesh and of my life, and not of the sterile shadows of buried loves.

Lie at ease, O my body, following thy voluptuous mission! Taste thy daily pleasure and thy passion without to-morrow. Leave not a single joy unknown, lest it be regretted at the day of thy death.

C
THE PERFUMES

[230]



WILL perfume all my skin that I may attract lovers. Upon my beautiful legs, in a basin of silver, I will pour the spikenard of Tarsos, and the metopion¹ of Egypt.

Under my arms, crushed mint; upon my eyebrows and upon my eyes, marjolaine of Koos. Slave, take down my hair and fill it with the smoke of incense.


Behold the oinanthe (briony) of the mountains of Kypros; I will let it run between my breasts; the liquor of roses which comes from Phaselis, shall embalm my neck and my cheeks.

And come, pour out upon my loins the irresistible bakkaris (inula). It is better for a courtesan that she should know the perfumes of Lydia, than the customs of the Peloponnesus.

¹ Galbanum.

CI
CONVERSATION

[232]

“OOD morning. — To you good morning. — Thou art in a hurry. — Perhaps less than you think. — Thou art a pretty girl. — Perhaps prettier than you believe.


“What is thy charming name? — I will not tell you that so quickly. — Thou hast no one for this evening? — Always my lover. — And how do you love him? — Any way he wishes.

“Shall we sup together? — If thou wishest. But what will you give me? — This. — Five drachmas? That must be for my slave. And for me? — Name the sum. — An hundred.

“Where dost thou live? — In this blue house. — At what hour may I send for thee? — At once, if you wish. — At once, then. — Go before, I will follow.”

CII
THE TORN ROBE

[234]

“OLA! by the two goddesses, who is the insolent one who has put his foot upon my robe?” — “It is a lover.” — “It is a bore.” — “I was awkward, pardon me.”

“Imbecile! my yellow robe is torn all up the back, and if I walk thus in the streets, I will be taken for a poor girl who serves Kypris inversely.”

“Will you not stop?” — “I believe he still speaks to me!” — “Will you leave me thus in anger? — You reply not? Alas! I dare speak no more.”

“I must return to my house to change my robe.” — “And I may not follow you?” — “Who is thy father?” — “He is the rich captain Nikias.” — “Thou hast fine eyes, I pardon thee.”

CIII
THE JEWELS

[236]



DIADEM of burnished gold crowns
my straight white brow. Five small
chains of gold, that twine about my
cheeks and chin, are hung to my hair
by two large pins.

Upon my arms, which Iris would envy, thirteen
bracelets of silver are tangled. How heavy they are.
But they are weapons, and I know an enemy who has
suffered from them.

Truly, I am covered with gold. My breasts are
cuirassed with two pectorals of gold. The images of
the gods are not more richly decked than I.

And I wear upon my robe a scaled belt of silver.
Upon it thou mayest read this verse: "Love me
eternally, but be not afflicted if I deceive thee three
times each day."

CIV
THE INDIFFERENT ONE

[238]



SINCE he has entered my chamber, whoever may he be (that is his affair):
“See,” I say to the slave, “what a beautiful man! And how happy should be a courtesan!”

I call him Adonis, Ares, Herakles, according to his face, or the Old Man of the Sea, if his hair is silver pale. And then who cares for fickle youth!

“Ah!” I say, “if to-day I had not to pay my florist and my jeweler, how I would like to tell thee, ‘I do not wish thy money! I am thy passionate servant!’”

Then, when he has closed his arms over my shoulders, I see a boatman of the port pass like a divine image over the starry heaven of my transparent lids.

CV
THE WATER IN THE BASIN

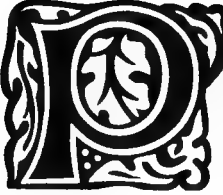
[240]

*"Pure water of the basin, motionless
mirror, tell me of my beauty"*

— THE WATER IN THE BASIN.

Original Etching by James Fagan.



“URE water of the basin, motion-
less mirror, tell me of my beauty.
— O Bilitis, or whoever thou art,
Tethys perhaps, or Amphitrite,
thou art beautiful, thou knowest it.

“Thy face bends under thy thick hair, burdened
with flowers and perfumes. Thine eyelids scarcely
open and thy flanks are tired with the movements of
love.

“Thy body, fatigued with the weight of thy
breasts, bears the fine marks of the nails, and the
blue stains of the kiss. Thine arms are reddened by
embraces. Each fold of thy body was loved. —

“Clear water of the basin, thy freshness brings
repose. Receive me who am worn in truth. Take
from me the stain of my lips (fard of my lips), and the
sweat from my body, and the memory of the night.”

CVI
LASCIVIOUSNESS

[242]



UPON a white terrace, at night, they left us swooning among the roses. The hot sweat rolled like tears from our armpits over our breasts. Overpowering pleasure empurpled our thrown-back heads. —

Four captive doves, bathed in four perfumes, flew about us in the silence. From their wings, upon the naked women fell drops of essence. I was showered with odors of iris.


O lassitude! I laid my cheek upon the body of a young girl, who enveloped herself in freshness from my damp hair. The odor of her saffroned skin intoxicated my opened mouth. She closed her thighs about my neck.

I slept, but an exhausting dream awakened me, the inyx,¹ bird of nocturnal desires, sang loudly from afar. I coughed with a shiver. A languishing arm, like a flower, raised itself in the air toward the moon.

¹ The wryneck, bird sacred to Venus.

CVII
THE HOSTELRY

[244]

“INE host, we are four. Give us a room with two beds. It is too late now to return to the city and the rain has ruined the roads.

“Bring us a basket of figs, some cheese, and some dark wine ; but first take off my sandals and wash my feet, for the mud tickles me.

“Let there be brought into the chamber two basins with water, a full lamp, a krater (a punch-bowl), and some kylix (goblets). Thou shouldst shake the coverlids, and beat the cushions.

“But let the beds be of good maple, and the planks must not squeak (must be silent)! Wake us not to-morrow.”

CVIII
DOMESTIC CARE

[246]



OUR slaves guard my house: two strong Thracians at my door, a Sicilian in my kitchen, and a kind and silent Phrygian woman for the service of my bed.


The two Thracians are fine men, they have staves in their hands with which to drive away poor lovers, and an hammer with which to nail upon the wall the wreaths that are sent to me.

The Sicilian is a rare cook; I paid twelve minæ for her. No other knows like she to prepare the fried croquettes and the cakes of poppy seed.

The Phrygian maid bathes me, combs my hair, and epilates my body. She sleeps in the morning in my chamber, and three nights in each month she takes my place with my lovers. —

CIX
THE BATH

[248]

“ITTLE girl, watch the door and let no one enter, for I and six girls with beautiful arms would bathe secretly in the warm water of the fountain.

“We would only laugh and swim. Let the lovers stay in the street. We will moisten our legs in the water and, seated upon the margin of the basin, we will play at dice.

“And also we will play at ball. Let no lovers enter; our tresses are too wet; our throats are all goose-flesh and the tips of our fingers are all in wrinkles. —

“Besides, he would repent it, he who should surprise us naked! Bilitis is not Athena, but she shows herself only at the hours she chooses and dazzles too ardent eyes.” —

CX
TO HER BREASTS

[250]



LESH - LIKE flowers, O my breasts :
how rich you are in voluptuousness !
My breasts in my hands, what lack
you of softness, and of mellow warmth
and of youthful perfume ?

Already you are polished like the breasts of a statue, and hard like the insensible marble. In order that you may submit, I will cherish you the more, you that were already loved.

Your sleek and rounded form is the honor of my brown body, whether I imprison you under a necklace of gold, or leave you free and naked, you precede me with your splendor.

Be then happy this night. If my fingers toy with you in caresses, you alone will know them until tomorrow morning ; for this night Bilitis has paid Bilitis.

CXI
MYDZOURIS

[252]



MYDZOURIS, little filth, cease thy weeping. Thou art my lover. If those women insult thee again, 'tis I will answer them. Come into my arms and dry thine eyes.

Yes, I know that thou art an horrible little creature, and that thy mother taught thee early to dare do all things. But thou art young, and therefore thou canst do nothing that is not charming.

The lips of a young girl of fifteen remain pure in spite of all. The lips of an hoary woman, though she be virgin, are degraded; for the sole disgrace is to grow old, and we are shamed only by wrinkles.

Mydzouris, I love thy frank eyes, thy shameless and impudent name, thy laughing voice, and thy light body. Live with me, thou shalt be my aid, and when we walk together, the women shall bid thee "Good morrow."

CXII
THE TRIUMPH OF BILITIS

[254]



IN procession I have been carried, in triumph ; I, Bilitis, all naked upon a shell-shaped car, upon which slaves, during the night, have cast ten thousand roses.

I reclined, my hands under my neck, my feet alone decked in sandals of gold, and my body stretched smoothly, upon the bed of my warm hair mixed with petals of fresh flowers.

Twelve children, with wings upon their shoulders, served me as though I were a goddess ; some held a shade over me, while others sprinkled me gently with perfume, or burned incense at the prow.

And about me I heard the hum of the ardent murmur of the throng, while the breath of desire floated about my nudity, in the blue smoke of the aromatics.

CXIII
TO THE GOD OF THE WOODS

[256]



VENERABLE Priapos, god of the woods, that I have had fastened in the marble margin of my bath, it is not without reason, O guardian of the orchards, that thou shouldst watch here over courtesans.

O God, we have not bought thee in order to sacrifice our virginity to thee: no one can give back that which exists no more, and the zealous votaries of Pallas run not in the streets of Amathonte.

No. Formerly thou didst watch over the leaf-decked locks of the trees, over the dewy flowers, over the heavy and savory fruits. 'Tis for that we have chosen thee.

Guard to-day our blond heads, the opened poppies of our lips, and the violets of our eyes. Guard the hard fruits of our breasts, and give us lovers who are like unto thee.

CXIV

THE DANCE WITH THE CASTINETTES

.

[258]



THOU attachest to thy light hands thy ringing crotals, Myrrhinidion, my dear one, and almost naked, out of thy robe thou advancest thy nervous thighs. How beautiful art thou, thine arms in the air, thine arched flanks and thy rosy breasts !

Thou commencest : thy feet one before the other pose, hesitate, and glide softly. Thy body bends like a scarf, thou caressest thy shivering skin, and pleasure inundates thy long, swooning eyes.

Suddenly thou strikest the castinettes ! Arch thyself upon thy firm-set feet, shake thy flanks, throw forward thy legs, and let thine hands, filled with noise, call all the desires in a band about thy turning body.

We, we applaud with loud cries : whether, smiling from the shoulder, thou shakest with a shiver thy convulsed, muscular hips, or if thou bendest, almost extended, to the rhythm of thy memories.



CXV
THE FLUTE - PLAYER

[260]



ELIXO, thy thighs pressed together,
thy body bent, thine arms before thee,
thou slippest thy light double flute
between thy lips, moist with wine, and
thou playest about the couch where
Teleas again embraces me.


Am I not most imprudent, I, who hire so fair a
girl to distract me in my laborious hours, I, who show
her thus nude to the curious eyes of my lovers, am I
not most careless?

No, Melixo, little music-maker, thou art an
honest friend. To-day thou hast not refused to
change thy flute for another when I despaired of
accomplishing a love full of difficulties. But thou
art to be trusted.

For I well know of what thou thinkest. Thou
awaitest the end of this night of excesses, which ani-
mates thee cruelly and in vain, and at the first glow
of the morning, thou wilt run in the street with
thine only friend, Psyllos, to thy little torn mattress.

CXVI
THE WARM GIRDLE

[262]

“HOU thinkest thou lovest me no more, Teleas, and since a month thou passest thy nights at table, as if the fruits, the wines, the honey, could make thee forget my lips. Thou thinkest that thou lovest me no more, poor fool!”

Saying that, I untied my moist girdle and rolled it about his head. It was still all warm with the heat of my body; the perfume of my skin poured out of its fine meshes.

He breathed with long breaths, his eyes closed; then I felt that he returned to me, and even saw clearly his desires reawaken, and he hid them not, but, as a ruse, I knew how to resist.

“No, my friend, this night, Lysippos possesses me. Adieu!” And I added as I fled: “Oh, gourmand of fruits and wines! The little garden of Bilitis has but one fig, but it is good.”

CXVII
TO A CONTENTED HUSBAND

[264]



ENVY thee, Agorakrites, that thou hast a wife so frugal. It is she herself who cares for the stable, and when morning comes, in place of loving thee, she goes to give drink to the cattle.

Thou mayest be glad of her. How many others, tell me, think of nothing but low pleasures, waking the night, sleeping the day, asking even from adultery a criminal satiety.

Yes; thy wife works in the stable. They say even that she has a thousand tendernesses for the youngest among thine asses. Ah! ha! 'tis a fine animal. He has a black spot above his eyes.

They say that she fondles him between his hoofs under his soft gray belly — But those who say that are scandal-makers. If thine ass pleases her, Agorakrites, it is no doubt that when she looks upon him she thinks of thee.

CXVIII
TO A PERVERTED ONE

[266]



THE love of women is the most beautiful thing of all that mortals can know, and thou wouldst think also thus, Kleon, if thou hadst a truly voluptuous soul; but thou drest only vanities.

Thou lovest thy nights in cherishing pubescents who are ungrateful to us. Look then upon them! how ugly they are! Compare their round heads with our long locks; seek our white breasts upon their flat bosoms.

By the side of their thin thighs, consider our luxuriant hips, broad hollow couches for lovers. And tell me what human lips, save those that wish it, can increase our lascivious joys.

Thou art sick, O Kleon, but a woman can cure thee. Go to the young Satyra, the daughter of my neighbor Gorgo, her croup is a rose in the sun, and she will not refuse thee the pleasure she herself prefers.

CXIX
INTIMACIES

[268]



HY am I become Lesbian, O Bilitis, thou askest me? But what player of the flute is not a Lesbian in some degree? I am poor; I have no bed; I lie with her who wishes me, and I thank her with that which I have.


When we are small we already dance naked; and what dances? Thou knowest, my dear one: the twelve desires of Aphrodite. We look each upon the other, we compare the beauty of our nakedness, and we find it beautiful.

During the long night we are warmed by the pleasure of the lookers-on; but our ardor is not feigned, and so strongly do we feel it, that sometimes, behind the doors, one of us may embrace a companion who consents.

How do we make love with a man who is rude to us? He takes us as he would a woman, and leaves us before the orgasm. Thou, thou art a woman and knowest what I mean. Thou canst take it as for thyself.

CXX
THE ENGAGEMENT

[270]

“ISTEN, old woman! I give a festival in three days. I must have an entertainment. Thou shalt let to me all thy girls. How many hast thou and what can they do?”

“I have seven. Three dance the Kordax with the scarf and the phallos. Nephelé with the sleek armpits will mimic the loves of the doves between her rose-colored breasts.

“A singer in a brodered peplos will sing the songs of Rhodes, accompanied by two auletrides (flute players) who will have garlands of myrtle rolled about their brown thighs.”

“It is well. See to it that they be freshly epilated, bathed, and perfumed from head to toe; ready for other games if it is asked of them. Go, give orders. Adieu.”

CXXI

THE DANCE OF PASIPHAË

[272]



URING a debauch that two young men and some courtesans made with me, where love was poured out like wine, Damalis, to fête her name, danced the figure of Pasiphae.

She had had made at Kition two masks, one of a cow, one of a bull, for her and for Khamantides: She wore terrible horns, and an hairy tail upon her croup.

The other women, led by me, held the flowers and torches, we turned upon ourselves with cries, and we caressed Damalis with the tips of our pendent locks.

Their lowings and our songs and the dancing of our loins, lasted longer than the night. The empty chamber is still warm. I look upon my reddened knees and upon the canthares (cups) of Khios, where float the roses.

CXXII
THE JUGGLER

[274]



WHEN the first pale light of the morning mingled itself with the feeble glow of our torches, I ordered to take part in the orgies a player of the flute, wicked and agile, who shivered a little, being cold.

Praise the little girl with blue pupils, with short hair, with sharp-pointed breasts, dressed only in a girdle, from which hang yellow ribbons, and the stems of black iris !

Praise her ! for she was adroit and performed many difficult tricks. She juggled with hoops, without breaking anything in the hall, and she slipped about among them like a grasshopper.

Sometimes she made of herself a wheel upon her hands and feet. And then her two legs in the air, and the knees spread apart, she curved herself backward until she touched the floor, always laughing.

CXXIII .

THE DANCE OF THE FLOWERS

[276]



AND THIS, the Lydian dancer, has seven veils about her. She unrolls the yellow veil, her black hair falls. The pink veil falls from her lips. The white veil falls and leaves to view her naked arms.

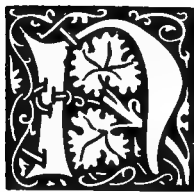
She loosens her little breasts from the red veil that unknots itself. She lets fall from her double and rounded hips the veil of green. She draws the veil of blue from her shoulders, but she presses upon her puberties the last transparent veil.

The young men supplicate her ; she throws her head backward ; at the sound of the flutes only, she draws it partly away, then suddenly, with the gesture of the dance, she culls the flowers of her body.

Singing : " Where are my roses ? Where are my perfumed violets ? Where are my tufts of parsley ? Behold my roses, I give them to you. Behold my violets, will you have them ? Behold my sweet
* * crinkled parsley."

CXXIV
BY VIOLENCE

[278]



O, thou shalt not take me by force,
count not on that, Lamprias. If thou
hast heard it said that Parthenis was
violated, know that she gave herself
up, for one plays not with us without invitation.

Oh, do your best, make every effort. See : it is a failure. I scarcely defend myself, yet. I shall not need call for help. And I do not even struggle ; but I stir. Poor friend, thou hast failed again.

Continue. This little game amuses me. Especially as I am sure to conquer. Again an unhappy effort, and perhaps thou wilt be less disposed to show me thy extinguished desires.

Butcher, what are you doing ! Dog ! thou wilt break my wrists ! and thy knee, thy knee that tears me apart ! Ah ! go, now, — it is a fine victory, that of ravishing a young girl in tears, upon the ground.

CXXV

A SONG

(THE FIRST GAVE ME A COLLAR)

[280]



HE first gave me a collar, a collar of pearls which was worth a city, with its palaces and its temples, its treasures and its slaves.

The second made verses to me. He said that my hair was black as those of the night, and that my blue eyes were as blue as the sky of the morning.

The third was so beautiful that his mother could not kiss him without blushing. He laid his hands upon my knees, and his lips upon my naked feet.

Thou, thou hast said nothing to me, thou hast given me nothing, for thou art poor, and thou art not beautiful, but 'tis thee I love.

CXXVI
ADVICE TO A LOVER



If thou wouldst be loved by a woman,
O young friend, whoever she may be,
tell her not that thou wouldst have
her, but let her see thee every day ;
then disappear, to return.

If she addresses her speech to thee, be amorous
without eagerness. She will come of herself to thee.
But thou must take her by force, the day when she
intends to give herself to thee.

When thou receivest her in thy bed, neglect thine
own pleasure. The hands of an amorous woman are
trembling and without caresses. Forgive them their
lack of zeal.

But as for thee, take no repose. Prolong thy
kisses till thou lovest breath. Let her not sleep,
even though she begs it of thee. Kiss always that
part of her body to which she turns her eyes.

CXXVII
FRIENDS AT DINNER

[284]



YROMERIS and Maskhalé, my friends, come with me, for I have no lover this evening, and, lying upon our beds of flax, we will talk while we dine.

A night of repose will do you good : you shall sleep in my bed, even without fards and with your hair disarranged. Wear a simple tunic of wool, and leave your jewels in their box.

No one shall make you dance that they may admire your legs and the heavy movements of your flanks. No one shall demand of you the sacred figures, that they may learn if you are passionate.

And I have not ordered for us two players of flutes with beautiful mouths, but two marmites of stewed peas, cakes of honey, some fried croquettes, and my last leathern bottle of Khios.

CXXVIII
THE TOMB OF THE YOUNG COURTESAN

[286]



ERE lies the delicate body of Lydé, little dove, the most merry of all courtesans, who more than any other loved the orgies, the floating hair, the smooth dances, and the tunics of hyacinth.

More than any other she loved the savory glottisms, the kisses upon her cheek, the games when the lamp alone saw, and the love that strained the limbs. And now she is naught but a little shadow.

But before putting her into the tomb, they have twisted her hair marvellously, have couched her among roses ; the stone even that they have placed over her is impregnated with essences and perfumes.

Holy earth, nurse of all things, receive gently the poor dead, let her slumber in thine arms, O Mother ! and make to grow about her tombstone, not nettles and briers, but tender white violets.

CXXIX

THE LITTLE SELLER OF ROSES

[288]



ESTERDAY, Nais said to me, "I was in the market-place, when a little girl with red curls passed before a group of young men, carrying some roses. And behold what I heard."

"Buy something of me." — "Explain thyself, little one, for we know not what you would sell: Thyself? thy roses? or all at once?" — "If you buy from me all these flowers, you may have mine for nothing."

"And how much do you want for your roses?" — "I must have six oboles for my mother, else I shall be beaten like a little bitch." — "Follow us. Thou shalt have a drachma." — "Then I will go and find my little sister?"

"Both followed these men. They had not even breasts, Bilitis, they knew not even how to smile. They trotted along like little kids that one leads to the butcher."

CXXX
THE DISPUTE

[290]



H ! by Aphrodite, behold thee ! bloody head ! filthy rottenness ! infection ! sterile one ! pillory ! awkward one ! good for nothing ! filthy sow ! Try not to fly from me, but come nearer still.

Look upon this woman of the sailors, who does not even know how to fold her vestments upon her shoulder, and who puts on her cosmetics so badly that the black of her eyebrows runs upon her cheek in a river of ink.

Thou art Phœnician : bed with those of thy race. As for me, my father was Hellene : I have the right over all those who wear the Petas.¹ And even over the others, if it pleases me.

Stop not in my street, or I will send thee to Hades to make love to Kharon, and I will say to thee justly : “ Let the earth cover thee lightly ! ” in order that the dogs may dig thee up again.

¹ A kind of cap.

CXXXI
MELANCHOLY

[292]



SHIVER ; the night is cool, and the forest damp. Why hast thou led me here? Is my great bed not softer than these moss-covered stones?

My flowery robe will bear marks of verdure ; my hair will be tangled with twigs ; my neck — look at my neck ; it is already soiled with the damp earth.

In other days I followed him into the wood who — Ah ! leave me a little time. I am sad to-night. Let me lie, my hand upon my eyes, without speaking.

In truth, canst thou not wait ! Are we beasts to take each other thus ! leave me. Thou shalt not open my knees nor my lips. My eyes even, for fear of tears, shall stay closed.

CXXXII
THE LITTLE PHANION

[294]



STRANGER, stop a moment, see who is beckoning to thee. It is the little Phanion of Kôs; she well merits that thou shouldst choose her.

Look, her hair is as curly as the leaves of parsley, her skin as soft as the down of a bird. She is small and brown. She speaks prettily.

If thou wouldst follow her, she will not demand of thee all the money thou hast gained in thy journey; no, not all, only a drachma or a pair of sandals.

Thou shalt find she has a fine bed, fresh figs, milk, wine, and should it be cold, she will have a fire.

CXXXIII
INDICATIONS

[296]




STRANGER who stops, if 'tis slender
thighs and nervous flanks you wish, a
hard bosom and knees that squeeze, go
to Plangon, she is my friend.

If thou seekest a laughing girl, with exuberant
breasts, a delicate form, the croup fat and the flanks
hollow, go even to the corner of this street, where
lives Spidorrhodellis.

But if long tranquil hours in the arms of a courtesan,
soft skin, the heat of the body, and the odor of
the hair pleases thee, find Milto, thou wilt be
content.

Expect not too much from love, but profit from
experience. One may ask everything from a woman
when she is naked, when it is night, and when the
hundred drachmas are on the hearth.

CXXXIV
THE MERCHANT OF SLAVE WOMEN

“HO is there ? ” — “ I am the merchant of women. Open the door, Sostraté, I offer you two bargains. This girl here first. Approach, Anasyrtolis, and strip thyself.” — “ She is a little too fat.”

“ She is a beauty. And more, she dances the kordax and knows eighty songs.” — “ Turn thyself. Lift thine arms. Show thy hair. Give me your foot. Smile. 'Tis well.”

“ — And this one now.” — “ She is too young ! — ”
“ Not at all, the day before yesterday she was twelve years old, and thou wilt not be able to teach her anything.” — “ Open thy tunic. Let us see ? No, she is thin.”

“ — I ask for her only one mine.” — “ And the first one ? ” — “ Two minæ thirty drachmas.” —
“ Three minæ for the two ? ” — “ Done.” — “ Go into the house and bathe yourselves. As for thee, Adieu.”

CXXXV
THE STRANGER

[300]



STRANGER, go no farther into the city. Thou wilt not find elsewhere than with me younger girls nor more expert. I am Sostraté, celebrated throughout the whole coast.

Look upon this one whose eyes are green as the water in the grass. Wilt thou not have her? Behold here other eyes that are as black as the violet, and hair dressed in three knots.

I have better still. Xantho, open thy cyclas. Stranger, these breasts are as hard as thy fist, feel them. And her beautiful belly, thou canst see thyself, wears three folds of Kypris.

I bought her with her sister, who is not yet of the age for love, but who will second her skilfully. By the two goddesses! thou comest of a noble race. Phyllis and Xantho, follow the gentleman.

CXXXVI
THE MEMORY OF MNASIDIKA

[302]



HEY danced, the one before the other, with a movement rapid and flying; they seemed always to seek to embrace, yet they never touched, unless it were with the tips of their lips.

When dancing, they turned their backs, they looked at each other, the head on the shoulder, shining sweat on their lifted arms, and their fine locks swinging before their breasts.

The languor of their eyes, the fire of their cheeks, the gravity of their faces, were three ardent songs. They touched each other furtively, they bent their hips.

Then suddenly they fell, to finish upon the earth the languorous dance — Memory of Mnasidika, 'tis then that thou came to me, and all except the dear image was unreal.

CXXXVII
THE YOUNG MOTHER

[304]



ELIEVE not, O Myromeris, that in becoming a mother, thou hast lessened thy beauty. Behold how thy body under thy robe has drowned its slight form under a voluptuous softness.

Thy breasts are two vast flowers reversed upon thy bosom, and their cut stems give out a milky juice. Thy belly, now more soft, melts under the hand.

And then consider thy little babe who was born of a thrill which thou hast felt in the arms of a passing lover whose name even thou hast not known. Dream of her distant destiny.

Those eyes that now scarcely open will one day be prolonged with a line of black tint, and they will sow among men both sorrow and joy, by the movement of their lashes.

CXXXVIII
THE UNKNOWN

[306]



He sleeps. I do not know him. He disgusts me. Nevertheless his purse is full of gold and he gave four drachmas to the slave on entering. I look for a mine for myself.

I told the Phrygian to enter the bed in my place. He was drunk and took her for me. I would rather die under torture than to stretch myself near to this man.

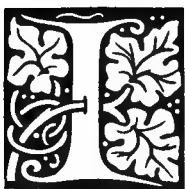
Helas! I think of the fields of Tauros — I was a little virgin — then. I had a light heart, and I was so foolish with amorous envy, that I hated my married sisters.

What then would I not have given to obtain that which I have refused this night! To-day my breasts are yielding and in my worn-out heart Eros slumbers from lassitude.

CXXXIX

DUPED

[308]



AWAKEN — is he then gone! He has left something? No: two empty amphoras and some faded flowers. All the rug is red with wine.

I have slept, but I am still drunk — with whom then did I come in? — At any rate we went to bed together. The bed itself is still moist with sweat.

Perhaps there were many, the bed is so disarranged. I no longer know — But some one must have seen them. There is my Phrygian, she sleeps still, across the threshold.

I give her a kick in the breasts and I cry: “Bitch, thou couldst not —” I am so enraged that I cannot speak more.

CXL
THE LAST LOVER

[310]



OME, boy, pass me not by without
having first loved me. I am still
beautiful in the night. Thou shalt see
that my autumn is warmer than the
spring-time of another.

Seek not for love among virgins. Love is a difficult art in which young girls are little learned. I have studied it all my life in order to give it to my last lover.

My last lover, that shall be thou, I know it. Behold my mouth, for which an entire people has paled with desire. Behold my hair, the same hair that Psappha the Great has sung.

I will gather in thy favor all that is left of my lost youth. I will destroy the memories themselves. I will give to thee the flute of Lykas, the girdle of Mnasidika.

CXLI
THE DOVE

[3¹²]



SINCE many years I have been beautiful; the day comes when I shall no longer be woman. And then I shall know the rending memories, the burning solitary envies and the tears in the hands.

If life is a long dream, what good to resist? Now four or five times in the night I demand amorous pleasure, and when my flanks are exhausted, I sink in sleep wherever my body falls.

In the morning I open my lids, and I shiver in my hair. A dove sits upon my window: I ask her, "In what month are we?" She replies: "It is the month in which women are in love."

Ah! whatever be the month, the dove tells the truth, Kypris! And I throw my two arms about my lover, and with trembling I stretch my legs, already benumbed, to the foot of the bed.

CXLII

THE RAIN IN THE MORNING

[314]



HE night wears by, the stars seem far away. Behold! the last of the courtesans have returned to their homes with their lovers, and I in the rain of the morning, I write these verses upon the sand.

The leaves are charged with brilliant drops. The rills across the path are dragging the sand and the dead leaves. The falling rain, drop by drop, makes holes in my song.

Oh! how sad and alone am I! The young men no more notice me, and the old ones have forgotten me. 'Tis well 'tis so. They shall learn my verses, they and the children of their children.

That is what Myrtale, nor Thais, nor Glykera may ever say, when the day comes that their beautiful cheeks are seamed with wrinkles. Those that shall love after me, shall sing my strophes.

[315]

CXLIII
THE TRUE DEATH

[316]



Original Etching by James Fagan.
 — THE TRUE DEATH.

me more."
 and behold, already I must add, no one will love
 It seems like I was born but yesterday.

*"Can it be that all is finished?
It seemeth me I was born but yesterday,
and behold, already I must say, no one will love
me more."*

— THE TRUE DEATH.

Original Etching by James Fagan.



PHRODITÉ, pitiless goddess, thou hast willed that the happy youth, the years of beautiful tresses, should end in a few days. Oh! that I were dead now.

I have looked upon myself in my mirror, I have no longer smiles or tears. O fair face that loved Mnasidika, I cannot believe thou wast ever mine.

Can it be that all is finished? I have not yet lived five times eight years. It seemeth me I was born but yesterday, and behold, already I must say, no one will love me more.

All my cut-off hair I have twisted into my cincture, and I offer it to thee, Kypris eternal, and I will never cease to adore thee. This, then, is the last verse of the pious Bilitis.

THE TOMB OF BILITIS

“Beauty is truth, truth, beauty,” — that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

JOHN KEATS.

FIRST EPITAPH

[320]



IN the country where the springs rise from the sea, and where the bed of flowers is made of flakes of rock, I, Bilitis, was born.

My mother was Phoinikienne ; my father, Damophylos, a Greek. My mother taught me to sing the songs of Byblos, sad as the light of the first dawn.

I have worshipped Astarté at Kypre. I have known Psappha at Lesbos. I have sung as I have loved. If I have loved well, passer-by, tell it to thy daughter.

And do not sacrifice for me a black goat ; but in fond libation, cast her warm milk upon my tomb.

SECOND EPITAPH

[322]



UPON the sombre banks of Melas, at Tamassos in Pamphylia, I, daughter of Damophylos, Bilitis, was born. I sleep far from my native land, as thou mayest see.

Even as a little child I learned the loves of Adonis and Astarté, the mysteries of holy Syré, and the death and the return to Her-of-the-rounded-pupils.

If I have been a courtesan, where is the harm? Was that not my duty as a woman? Stranger, the Mother-of-all-things guides us. To disown her is not prudent.

In gratitude to thee who hast stopped to read, I wish thee this destiny: "Mayest thou be loved, and never love." Adieu! remember well, when thou art old, that thou hast seen my tomb.

LAST EPITAPH

[324]



UNDER the black leaves of the laurels,
under the amorous flowers of the rose,
'tis here that I lie prone, I who have
known to fit verse to verse, and to sing
the praise of kisses.

I grew up in the land of the nymphs. I have
lived in the island of lovers. I am dead in the Island
of Kypris. 'Tis for that my name is illustrious, and
my tombstone polished with oil.

Mourn not for me, thou who stoppest to read.
Mine was a noble funeral. The mourners wept away
their cheeks. They have hidden in my tomb my
mirrors and my necklaces.

And now among the pale fields of asphodels, I
walk, an impalpable shadow, and the memory of my
terrestrial life is the joy of my life subterrestrial.

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NOTES¹

I

Thou wast asking a short time ago for the name of this woman of Pamphylia, who was the friend of Sappho and who composed amorous songs and hymns in the Eolian and Pamphylian mode? — I did ask it, and thou hast not told me the name. — I did not tell it to thee, but I explained to thee the form of these hymns and how the Eolian mode passed into that which is much older and appropriate to the Pamphylians — the name of this wise woman is Damophyle, and it is said that like Sappho she surrounded herself with young virgins. — *Philostrate, Life of Apollonius, i. 30.*

This passage evidently refers to Bilitis, daughter of Damophylos. Without doubt the name of Damophylé was given to her at Lesbos, or that of Bilitis had through its Phœnician origin an unusual method of pronunciation which escapes us. Philostrate has remarked that the form of these songs is strongly tinged by Oriental influences. Their style shows the same traces; it is therefore almost incomprehensible, so much is it dominated by barbarous words derived from Semitic roots. Without the very complete lexicon with

¹ These notes appear at the end of the first edition of the "Songs of Bilitis" as published in 1894.

which M. G. Heim has provided his edition, I would have been obliged to renounce my attempt to interpret their abnormal text. Beyond this its reading is by no means an agreeable task, and I have not thought it necessary to publish it here, opposite its translation.

II

The edition of M. Heim bears the following title :
*Bilitis' sämtliche Lieder, zum ersten Male herausgegeben,
und mit einem Wörterbuche versehen, von G. Heim. Leipzig. 1894.*

The first volume alone has appeared, which comprises the text, the preface, the notes, and the lexicon. The second volume will be an atlas of fifty-two plates in which will be reproduced all the objects found in the sarcophagus of Palæo-Limisso, the sarcophagus itself, and the plates of black amphibolite which carry the precious manuscript.

These relics are at present exhibited at the museum of Larnaka. I was unable to obtain permission to have designs made of them before M. Heim had finished his work; but the distinguished professor has given me the assurance that his atlas will be published simultaneously at Leipzig and at Paris, and may possibly form part of the present volume.

There is to be seen at the Louvre a mask of terra-cotta

which recalls in a singular manner, although much smaller, that of Larnaka. It is the head of a woman with painted lips and painted eyes, catalogued under the number 62 in the cabinet of Rhodes. (Section of Comparative Ethnology.) Unfortunately it is illumined from the left side, which is unfavorable for it; and as it is hung very high, one sees it at an angle which gives it a somewhat ridiculous appearance. If this note by chance should awaken the curiosity of a reader, in love as I am with the pious Bilitis, I would add that M. Achille Jacquet has made a very fine engraving of this little face in L'Atlas of M. Heuzey: *Les Figurines de terre cuite au Musée du Louvre*. It is the fifth subject of the thirteenth plate.

^t
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THE TOMB OF BILITIS

First Epitaph
Second Epitaph
Third Epitaph

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